TIRUVĀYMOḺI
ENGLISH GLOSSARY

VOLUME I

by

(Jñāna Bhakti Bhūṣaṇa)

S. SATYAMURTHI AYYANGAR, GWALIOR

Published with the financial assistance from the Government of India, Ministry of Education & Social Welfare (Department of Education)

ANANTHACHARYA INDOLOGICAL RESEARCH INSTITUTE

G. D. SOMANI MEMORIAL BUILDING

625, CUFFE PARADE, BOMBAY 400 005

1981

ANANTHACHARYA INDOLOGICAL RESEARCH INSTITUTE SERIES

No. V

General Editor :

K. K. A. VENKATACHARI, Ph.D.

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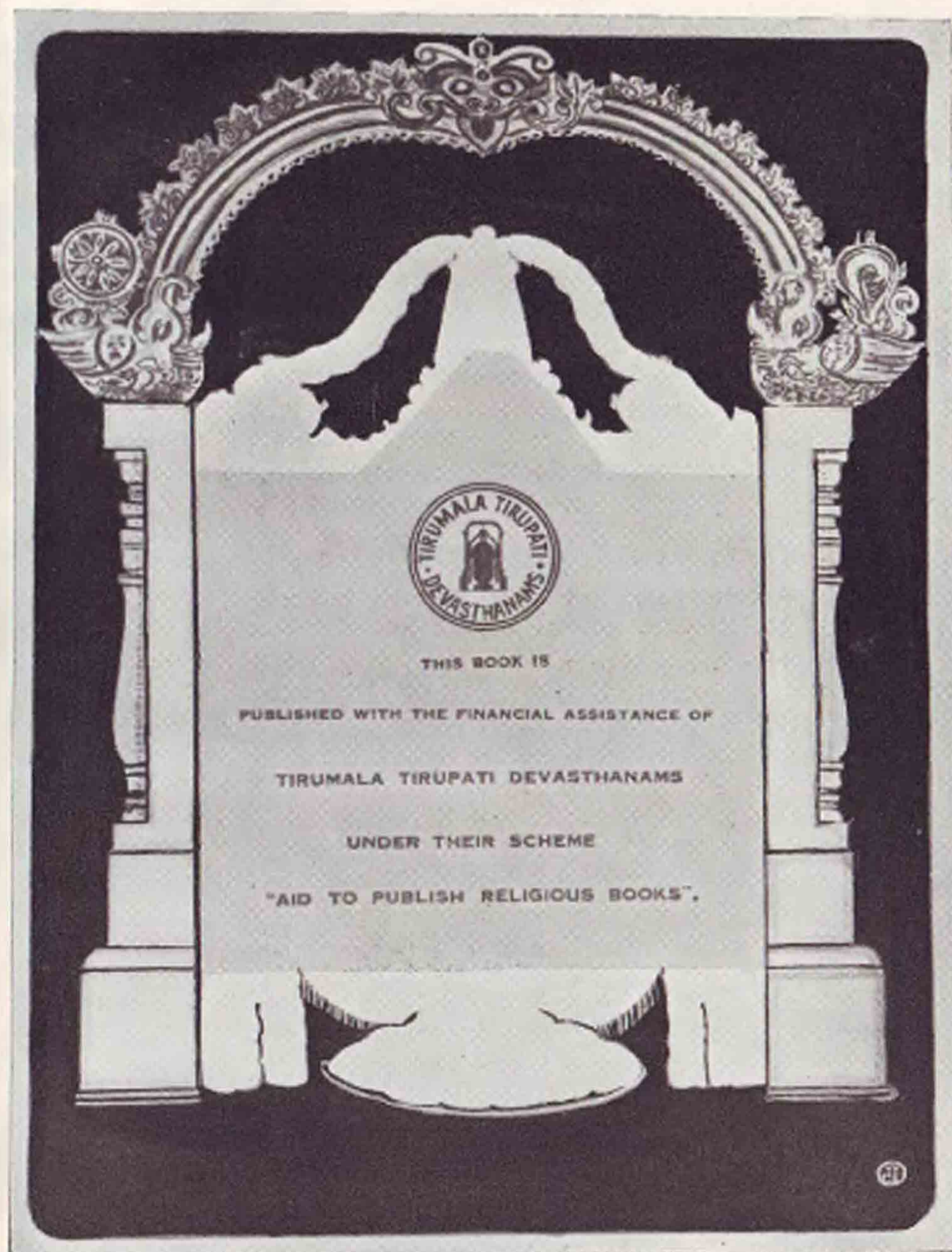
ANANTHACHARYA INDOLOGICAL RESEARCH INSTITUTE
G. D. SOMANI MEMORIAL BUILDING
625, CUFFE PARADE, BOMBAY 400 005
1981

First Edition: 500 copies

Copies can be had of:

1. Ananthacharya Indological Research Institute, 625, Cuffe Parade, Bombay-400 005
2. The Author, 9-10, Prem Nagar, Gwalior-474 002

PRINTED IN INDIA
AT HOE & CO., THE "PREMIER" PRESS, MADRAS-600 001



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INTRODUCTION

Bhakti Movement in South India

The bhakti movement in South India came to the fore during the sixth to the ninth centuries A.D. This was the period in which many mystic poets, both the Nāyaṉmārs of Saivism and the Āḻvārs of Śrīvaiṣṇavism, went about singing the praises of the Lord. They wandered from place to place and composed their hymns in praise of the particular deity in that place.

The subject matter of all Tamil poetry has traditionally been categorised as broadly two—akam and puṟam. Akam ('internal') is what pertains to the individual and the private, the inner, the introvert. Puṟam ('external') is what pertains to the public man, king or officer, the outer, the extrovert. Love poetry will come under akam and the poetry of heroism or war under puṟam.

The intense devotion which the Nāyaṉmārs and Āḻvārs felt towards God would normally come under akam. The Vaishnavite Āḻvārs went one step further than their contemporary Nāyaṉmārs thinking of this devotion in terms not so much of man and God as of man and his beloved, whether a child (Periyāḻvār) or a lover (Āṇṭāḷ). The human soul longs for God as a woman for his sweetheart. It is the theme of the Biblical *Song of Songs* but with the roles reversed—not the man singing for the woman but the woman for the man. The parallel to this in western religious literature is the mystical poetry of St. Theresa with its passionate love for Jesus.

Recital of Hymns in Temples

The chanting of hymns in Saivite as well as Vaiṣṇava temples was in vogue long before the time of Rāmānuja. There are inscriptions relating to the reign of Pārantaka I at Lalgudi and Allur in the Tiruchirapalli district from which it is seen that provision had been made for singing the 'Tiruppadiyam' in Saivite

temples.[1] There are similar references in inscriptions dating right from the time of Raja Raja Cola which go to prove that provision was made for the chanting of Tiruvāymoḷi by Tiruvāymoḷi Tēvar in Vaiṣṇava temples.[2] Not only the hymns, Tiruvāymoḷi, of Nammāḷvār but the hymns of other Āḷvārs also were chanted in the temples on particular occasions.[3]

Codification of Hymns

It is an interesting feature of the bhakti movement in South India that the codifications of the Saivite hymns by Nampi Āṇṭār Nampi and of the Śrī Vaiṣṇava hymns, Divya Prabandams, by Nāthamuni were effected more or less about the same period and in the same region.[4] Nāthamuṇi's period must have been around the end of the ninth and the beginning of the tenth centuries.

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[1] At Lālguḍi and Allūr in the Trichinopoly district are found inscriptions of the reigon of Parāntaka I, providing for Brahmins singing the Tiruppadiyam during the daily service in the temples. Earlier than Parāntaka's reign, in the reign of the Pallava Vijaya - Nandi-Vikrama Varman, reciters of the Tiruppadiyam are enumerated in the list of persons employed in the service of a temple at Tiruvallam.

(Page 637, The Colas, K. A. Nilakanta Sastri)

[2] The mention of Tiru-Vāymoḷidevar in an inscription at Ukkal in Rājarāja's reign, and of the recitation of Tiruppadiyam in Viṣṇu temples is enough to show the parallelism in practice between Saivism and Vaiṣṇavism in this respect.

(Page 639, The Colas, K. A. Nilakanta Sastri)

[3] The fact that the hymn of Kulaśekhara-āḷvār beginning tettarundiṟal was recited before the deity during three nights in the course of a festival in Srirangam is mentioned in an inscription of A.D. 1088.

(Page 639, The Colas, K. A. Nilakanta Sastri)

[4] Tradition confers upon Nathamuni the honour of having done for Vaiṣṇava lyrics what Nambi Āṇḍār Nambi achieved for the Śaiva ones. If Śrīnātha who seems to be mentioned in the Anbil plates may be taken to be the same as the Vaiṣṇava Saint Nāthamuni, his age would be the end of the ninth and the beginning of the tenth centuries A.D., and this accords well with the other testimony we have, meagre as it is, on the subject.

(Page 638, The Colas, K. A. Nilakanta Sastri)

As per the traditional account Nāthamuṇi once heard some visitors to his place from Kurukūr, the birth place of Nammāḷvār, recite a hymn of ten verses from *Tiruvāymoḷi*. He was enchanted by the melody of the hymn. Realising that they were only part of a thousand verses composed by Nammāḷvār, Nāthamuṇi journeyed to Kurukūr in the hope of discovering the remaining verses. At Kurukūr, Nāthamuṇi worshipped Lord Viṣṇu and then repaired to the foot of the tamarind tree under which Nammāḷvār had spent his time, in the hope of having the Darśan of Nammāḷvār. He was disappointed however. Then he started reciting Madhura Kavi's ten stanzas in praise of his guru, Nammāḷvār. When he recited those stanzas 12,000 times, both Nammāḷvār and Madhura Kavi appeared before him and imparted to him the knowledge of the four works of Nammāḷvār. Thereafter Nāthamuṇi stayed on in Kurukūr, meditating upon the Prabhandas, till he was summoned to his native place Vīranārāyaṇapuram by the deity of that place. And in his native place he and his disciples spent their time chanting the hymns.

Apart from tradition, it is now accepted that it was Nāthamuṇi who codified the hymns, Divyaprabandhams, of the Āḷvārs, as mentioned in the Guruparampara prabhāvam.[5]

The Concept of Ubhaya Vedānta

One of the most important contributions of the Śrī Vaiṣṇava Ācāryas is the establishment of the concept of Ubhaya Vedānta, *i.e.*, the equal validity of both the Sanskrit śruti or revealed texts and the Tamil hymns of the Āḷvārs, those who had immersed themselves in God and his qualities.

The history behind the concept of 'Ubhaya-Vedānta' is most significant for it depicts the way in which the hymns of the Āḷvārs came to be considered as Vedānta in Tamil. According to the Acārya Hṛdayam, the Vedas as we know are śruti, *i.e.* what was heard or revealed, and anādi *i.e.*, without beginning or authorship. They are the supreme authority. The Tamil hymns are equally claimed to be "anādi" in the Śrī Vaiṣṇava tradition. They have a 'beginning', ādi, from the Āḷvārs only in the sense that the latter

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[5] Guruparamparā Prabhāvam—Āṟāyirappati, page 120.

were the instruments through which the Supreme Lord, Nārāyaṇa, revealed His will. He says that like 'śruti' which was given by Lord to Brahmā, Divya Prabhandhams were also given by Lord to the Āḷvārs.[6] Āḷvārs started giving equal status to Tamil al ng with Sanskrit. For instance, Kulaśekhara Āḷvār in his Perumāḷtirumoḷi refers to Lord as the northern language, Sanskrit, and the poem of sweet joy in Tamil.[7]

Tirumaṅkai Āḷvar in his Tiruneṭuntāṇṭakam describes the Lord as one who is in the form of the sound of Tamil, which has the power of expression and who is in the form of the Sanskrit word, Vaṭacol. It is worthy of note here that the Alvar gives prime importance to Tamil which has felicity in expression and only refers later to Sanskrit without any qualifying epithet for the northern language. In the same stanza, Tirumaṅkai Āḷvār calls the Lord as the mantra of Vedānta, denoting that all the Upanishads describe only Him. From this one can glean that the Āḷvār is attaching equal significance to Tamil, Sanskrit and Vedānta, who is God Himself, the primordial cause of everything.[8]

Maturakavi, a direct disciple of Saṭakopan, says about his ācārya, as "He who composed the stanzas through which the inner meaning of the Veda of the great Vetiyars (Brahmins) is established in my heart."[9]

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6 Ācārya hṛdayam Cūrṇikai 41,
" " 49.

7 Antamiḻinpaṟaviṉai avvaṭamoli yai ppaṟṟaṟṟārkaḷ........

(*Perumāḷ tirumoḻi—1-4*)

8 intiraṟkum piramaṟkum mutalvaṉtaṉṉai irunilam kāl tī nīr viṉ ptūam aintāy
centiṟattatamḻiocai vaṭacollāki ticaināṉkumāy tiṅkaḷ ñāyiṟāki
antarattil tevarkkaum aṟiyalākā aṅtaṉaṉai antaṉarmāṭṭu antivaitta
mantirattai manirattāl maṟavātu eṉṟum vāḻutiyēl vaḷalām maṭaneṅcamē.

(*Tiruneṭuntāṇṭakam, 4*)

9 mikkavētiyar vētattiṉuṭporuḷ niṟkappāṭi yenneñcuḷ niṟuttināṉ
takkacīr caṭakopaneṉ nampikku āḷ pukkakātal aṭimaip payaṉaṉṟē.

(*Kaṇṇinuṇciruttāmpu, 9*)

Maturakavi says that Saṭakopaṉ has mercifully sung one thousand sweet hymns in Tamil, which would make happy the devotees, who forever engage themselves in praising the glory of the Lord.[10]

Yāmuna does not refer to Tiruvāymoḷi as Drāvida Veda, but in Stotraratna he does pay homage to the feet of Vakulābharaṇa, Nammāḷvār, whom he calls the first Ācārya (Stanza-5). Many of Yāmuna's ideas are parallel to those of the Āḷvārs. It includes for instance, a direct translation from Kulasekhara in Stanza 26 of Stotraratna[11].

Guruparampara records that as part of his temple reforms Ramānuja included the chanting of hymns of the Divya Prabandha.[12] The author of Ācārya Hṛdayam has recorded that Rāmānuja used to explain the Brahma-sūtras with the aid of Tiruvāymoḷi.[13]

That the Divya Prabandhas had been accepted by Śrīvaiṣṇavas as equivalent to the Sanskrit Vedas as part of regular temple worship is evident from the reference to Nammāḷvar in the Stotras

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10 Aruḷkoṇṭāṭum aṟiyavar iṉpuṟa
aruḷiṉāṉ avvarumaṟaiyinporuḷ
aruḷkoṇṭu āyiram iṉtamiḻ pāṭināṉ
aruḷ kaṇṭīr ivvulakinilmikkatē.

(*Kaṇṇinuṇciruttāmpu, 8*)

11 ar ciṉattāl iṉṟatāy akaṟṟiṭinum maṟṟavaḷtaṉ aruḷ ninainte aḻumkuḻavi atuvē poṉṟiruntēṉē.

(*Kulacekara, Perumāḷtirumoḻi, 5 : I*)

ruṣā nirastopi śiśuḥ stanandhayaḥ najātu matuḥ carnaṇau jihāsati.

(*Yāmuna, Stotraratna, sta. 26*)

12 Guruparamparā prabhāvam—pp. 181 ff.

13 Bhāṣyakārar itukoṇṭu sūtra
vyākhyānaṅkaḷ oruṅku viṭuvar.

(*Āāryahṛdayam—cu-65*)

of some of the direct disciples of Rāmānuja, like Kūresa and his son, Parāsara Bhattar.[14]

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[14] (a) Traividya Vṛdha jana mūrdha vibhūṣanam yat
Sampat ca sātvikajanasya Yadeva nityam.
Yadvā Saraṇyam Asaraṇya janasya pumsām
Tat Samsrayēma Vakuḷābharaṇa anghriyugmam.

(*Śrīvaikuṇṭha Stavam—2*)
Kuresa

"Let us prostrate before the lotus feet of *Nammelvar*, the only refuge for even the indifferent and the uncared for. Bow before those feet which are simultaneously a unique treasure house for the Sattvikas and an incoparable jewel on their beads."

(*Stanza—2*)

(b) Baktiprabhāva bhavadadbhu ta bhava
Sandhuksita pranayasāra rasougha purnah.
Vedārtharatna nidhiḥ acyutadivya dhāmā
Jīyāt paraṅkusa pyodhirsīma bhūmā.

(*Śrī Vaikuṇṭha Stavam—3*)
Kuresa

"Hail to Nammalvar who competes with the ocean in his qualities of divine love: immeasurable is his love for the Lord, even as the full waters of the ocean. Variegated and most wonderful are the myriad moods of his love for Him (the Nava-rasas even as the ocean contains unheard of treasures) Immortal shall he be who is our and our Lord's pride of possession".

(*Stanza—3*)

(c) Vakuladhara Sarasvatī viṣakta Svararasa bhāvayutasu kinnarīṣu.
dravati dṛṣadapi prasakta gānāsu iha vanaśaila tatiṣu Sundrasya.

(*Sundara bahustava—12*)
Kuresa

The very stones melt, when kinnara maidens, who are endowed with perception of swara, rasa and bhava, sing the "Saraswati of Vakuladhara" (hymns of Nammalvar), from the valleys of 'Sundara' hill —(Alakarmalai)".

(d) Rṣim juṣāmahe kṛṣṇa tṛṣṇātatvam ivoditam.
Sahasra sākhām yodrāksit drāviḍīm braha Sanyanitam

(*Śrī rangarājastava—6* (*Parāśara Bhaṭṭar*)

"We bow before that saint Nammalvar who perceived the Brahma samhita (Upanishad) in Tamil, having a thousand branches and who is the very personification, as it were, of the thirst for Kisna."

Though Nāthamuṇi and Āḷavandar were instrumental in introducing the chanting of the Divya Prabandham in Vaiṣṇava temples, it was Rāmānuja who systematised it and arranged for the chanting of hymns as an integral part of the temple ritual. This is borne out by the inscriptions relating to the post-Rāmānuja period.[15] This is also known from the Koyil oḷuku, which is a recorded document on the Srirangam temple routine from the time of Rāmānuja.

The concluding session in Śrīvaiṣṇava daily or special worship, as in the case of a festival of the presiding deity or Āḷvār or Ācārya, has an important item called 'Cāṟṟumuṟai', which marks the end of the recitation of the Divya Prabandham. After the recital of the last two verses of each work of the Āḷvār followed by two verses of Tiruppallāṇṭu, two verses are sung which m an the following: . "May the divine command of the venerable Rāmānuja. grow stronger and stronger, with its powers unobstructed in all places and on all occasions and at all times. May the divine command of Rāmānuja shine forth every day and pervade all places, for it aims at the welfare of all the worlds. O Lord, please make the glory of Śrirangam grow strong every day without any hindrance."[16]

It may also be noted that Rāmānuja's systematisation of temple worship is adopted even in domestic worship, which is is followed by Cāṟṟumuṟai. Further, the influence of Rāmānuja

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[15] **Divyaprabhandha recital in vaisnava Temples.**—Dr. K. V. Raman

(*Śrī Rāmanuja Vāṇī—October 1979, pp. 33ff*).

[16] Sarvadėsa sadākāleṣu avyāhata parākramā.
rāmānujārya divyājñyā vardhatām abhivardhatām.
rāmānujārya divyājñyā prativāsarm ujvalā.
Digantavyāpiniu bhūyat sāhi lokahitaiṣinī.

(*Śrīmanna Śrīrangaśriyam anupadravā anudinam savardhaya*)

can also be seen in the singing of the hymns of Āḷvārs in marriage ceremonies and in obsequies.[17]

Śrī Nammāḷvār

Śrī Nammāḷvār was born at Tirukkurukūr, also known as Āḷvār tirunakari, in the Vēlālar Community of fourth Varṇa. His parents were Kāri and Uṭaiya Naṅkai. He was given the name, Māṟaṉ by his parents.

It is said that as soon as he was born, he was so absorbed in the contemplation of God that he would not eat or drink but soon took up residence under a tamarind tree and remained there. He radiated a saintly effulgence which could be seen from far and wide. In fact, Matura Kavi who was on tour in the North saw it and hastened to the South, following the direction of the effulgence. He reached the city of the Āḷvār and located the Tamarind tree under which Nammāḷvār was seated. There the meeting took place between these two great souls, Nammāḷvār and Matura Kavi, the latter himself one of the Āḷvārs. Matura Kavi saw with wonder that Nammāḷvār did not take any food or water and would also not talk to anybody. He put the question to him: "A little thing born in a dead body, what will it eat and where will it live?" Nammāḷvār replied: "It will eat that and lie there." Matura Kavi realised that Nammāḷvār meant that though the body is a dead thing and soul infinitely small, it had the capacity to stay in the body and live on it. By this Nammāḷvār sought also to convey

[17] The ten stanzas of "Nācciyār Tirumoḻi" beginning with "Vāraṇamāyiram", where Āṇṭāḷ dreams of her marriage with Lord Nārāyaṇa, are usually sung during the weddings of the south Indian Śrī Vaiṣṇavite community. This may well be taken as an index of the deep penetrative influence of the hymns of Āḷvārs on the social life of the Śrī Vaiṣṇava Community.

Before the commencement of funeral ceremonies in (case of death to the members of) the Śrī Vaiṣṇava community when the dead body (prēta) is washed and the caste mark applied, at least a hundred stanzas of Nammāḷvār are chanted. This is done as if to indicate the longing of the individual soul to reach the lotus feet of the Lord. Similarly, at the conclusion of the ceremonies on the 13th day, thousand hymns of Nammāḷvār (*i.e.* Tiruvāymoḻi) are chanted to signify the liberation of the soul.

that emancipated souls, though finite and small, dwell in God and God is their food, wealth, mind, wisdom, bliss and everything. He himself has spoken of service of God as the greatest gift of God, exceeding even the matter of liberation from the cycle of births. The teachings of Nammāḷvār are said to be capable of liberating anyone. His influence on the course of religious history was enormous.

The place of Nammāḷvār in Śrī vaiṣṇavism can be gauged from the fact that he is held to be the most important among the Āḷvārs. When one considers that he was of the fourth *varṇa*, one can understand the height to which a person can rise by the love of God. His very name, Nammāḷvār, our Āḷvār, shows the esteem and affection in which he is held in the Śrīvaiṣṇva community. He is also known as Satakopa, which is a symbol representing the Lord's feet are placed on the devotee's head in reverential worship. He himself had stated: " By becoming servants of the Lord, we have verily become, as it were, His sacred sandals" (Tiruvantāti-31). Besides Tiruvāymoḻi, his other works are: Tiruviruttam, Tiruvāciriyam and Periya Tiruvantāti.

Matura Kavi Āḷvār

The meeting of Matura Kavi and Nammāḷvār has already been described. Nammāḷvār's statement that he was enjoying God, as his food and resting in God made Matura Kavi realise the profound truth in it; then and there he chose Nammāḷvār as his ācārya. He learned all the hymns of the great saint and followed the method of bhakti and prapatti scrupulously. The traditional accounts include him among the Āḷvārs, though with a difference. While all other Āḷvārs enjoyed the mystic vision of God and His infinite auspicious attributes, Matura Kavi sang about the glory of Nammāḷvār alone in his only composition. It is called 'Kaṇṇinuṇ Ciruttāmpu' in which he sings the praise of Nammāḷvār or Saṭakōpaṉ. The fact that he has been elevated on the strength of this only work, demonstrates the significance of the deep devotion to Ācaryas.

Status of Devotees

Vedānta Desika in the Chapter 'Prabhāva Vyavasthā ādhikāra' of his work 'Rahasya Traya Sāra' discusses elaborately on devotees

born in a lower varṇa. He refers to the Purāṇas wherein it has been stated that a devotee, even though of a lower varna, is superior to one of a higher varna who is not a devotee.

Vedānta Desika held firm views on varṇas and the Varṇāśrama Dharma. According to him a person born in a lower varṇa and who is a devotee of Lord Visnu is venerable! This veneration does not make the devotee get the social status of a higher varṇa. To establish this, Vedānta Desika has mentioned the simile of the Surabhi, Kamadhenu, which furnishes all that people desire, but is still a cow. The same thing applies to the Bhāgavata, who should be venerated but who cannot change his varṇa.

Vedānta Desika discusses about this elaborately in this chapter and cites the cases of Vyādha and Tulādhara. These two, though born in a lower Varṇa and thus ineligible to study the Vedas or teach them, were still able to clarify the doubts of the Brahmins who approached them for clarification on points in the Vedas. Desika says that they were like guides who direct travellers who had strayed into the forest. Vyādha and Tulādhara were important only for guidance but could not became members of a higher Varṇa. As regards Āḷvārs, according to Vedānta Desika, they were of a special category and could not be classified with mortals. In his Guru Paramparāsāram, he calls the ten Āḷvārs as the Navina Dasāvatara, or the new ten incarnations of this Lord.

While discussing the question of Nammāḷvār's birth, Aḷakiya Maṇavāḷa Perumāl Nāyaṇār in his Ācārya Hṛdayamit compares to that of Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Kṛṣṇa Dvāipāyaṇa, Vyāsa, but with a difference. Śrī Kṛṣṇa was born in prison in Matura and was brought up by his foster-mother, Yasoda in Gokulam. Vyāsa was born to Machcha Gandhi and was also not brought up by her. But Nammāḷvār was born in Tirukurukūr. and brought up by his parents. The places of birth of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, Vyāsa and Nammāḷvār are also significant. Śrī Kṛṣṇa was born in prison and Vyāsa on the sea-shore whereas Nammalvar was born in a town in a fertile region on the bank of river Tamiraparaṇi.

According to the author of Ācārya Hṛdayam, the principles of Varṇāśrama Dharma cannot be applied to the devotees of the Lord. Those who do so are ignorant and wallowing in darkness. Further

he cites the cases of Tiruppaṇāḷvār, Tirukacci Nampi and Kurumpu Aṛutta Nampi, who were born in lower Varṇas. He also compares Nammāḷvār's case to that of Varahavatara and Kṛṣṇavatāra. In Varāhāvatāra, the Lord incarnated as a boar to redāeem the earth. In Kṛṣṇāvatāra, the Lord was born among the cow-herds to uplift them. In the same way Nammāḷvār was born in a lower varṇa to uplift mankind.

From the above, it will be seen that these two ācāryas approach the matter of Nammāḷvār's birth in a lower varṇa from different angles. Vedānta Desika says that the matter of birth in a lower Varṇa should not be taken into account in the case of Āḷvārs. Aḷakiya Maṇavāḷa Perumāl Nāyaṇār, a younger contemporary of Vedanta Desika says that Nammalvar was born in low varna purposely to uplift mankind, just as in the case of Kṛṣṇāvatāra and Varāhāvatāra.

Commentaries on Tiruvāymoḻi

Upto the time of Rāmānuja, devotees and disciples learned the subtlety and meanings of Tiruvāymoḷi only by word of mouth, in a continuous Ācārya-Siṣya tradition. The first recorded commentary on Tiruvāymoḷi was by Tirukkurukai Pirāṉ Piḷḷāṉ, a disciple of Rāmānuja, who wrote it as per the instruction of his preceptor. I was called *Ārāyirappaṭi.* (Six thousand 'Paṭi's, A paṭi consists of 32 letters.) In fact all the five important commentaries on Tiruvāymoḷi, so far have this suffix 'paṭi' added on to their titles). The other commentaries are briefly described below:

Onpatināyirappaṭi. This was written by Nañcīyar who learned Tiruvāymoḷi from his ācārya, Parasara Bhaṭṭar. This is more elaborate than Arayirappaṭi. In this, Naṇcīyar stresses the importance of the Tamil language as a vehicle for spiritual revelation. Nañcīyar's contribution to Śrī Vaiṣṇavism is important.

Paññır Ayirappaṭi. The author of this commentary is Vāṭi Keari Aḷakiya Mañavāḷa De ikara disciple of Periya vāccāṉ Pillai. Almost illiterate in the beginning, he had the good fortune to be blessed with the grace of his preceptor and became erudite and wrote many scholarly treatises, including this commentary.

Irupattinalayirappati. This commentary is written by Periya Vāccāṉ Piḷḷai, a disciple of Nampiḷḷai. Periya Vāccāṉ Piḷḷai's contribution to the Maṇipravāḷa Literature is significant. Because of his methodical and systematic approach in his treaties, he was given the title 'Vyakhānacakravartin', emperor of commentators.

Muppattiārāyirappati. Of all the commentaries of Tiruvāymoḷi, that have gained prominence so far, this is considered to be the most exhaustive. This is also known as 'ĪṬU' and is held in high esteem by Śrivaiṣṇavites. The author of this commentary was Vaṭakku Tiruvīti Piḷḷai, another disciple of Nampiḷḷai. This is supposed to have been recorded after listening to the discourses of Nampillai. This work is accepted as a scripture by all Tenkalai Śrī vaiṣṇavas and the followers of Ahobila Mutt of the Vaṭakalai tradition.

Acknowledgement

It is our duty to acknowledge with grateful thanks the literary and financial help received from diverse sources in the presentation of this work. Mr. S. Satyamurti Ayengar, Retired Officer of the Indian Audit Department, is deeply interested in Śrivaiṣṇava tradition and has undergone "Kālakshepam" with Srī U. Ve. P. B. Annangarāchariār Swami among others. The English Glossary of Tiruvāymoḷi, which we are presenting is a good example of the traditional approach.

As a supplement to the first volume, we are presenting a booklet by Prof. David Kaylor and Dr. K. K. A. Venkatachari entitled, "God far; God near"—An Interpretation of the Thought of Nammāḷvār, which is a critical appreciation of the original text of Tiruvaymoli and the philosophy found in the hymns as seen by these authors.

A munificent grant by the Ministry of Education, Government of India, has been vital for publishing this work and the Institute is thankful to the Government for enabling us thereby no foster the pursuit of research and study in Indology. We are thankful to the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams, who, as ever, have come forward to our aid with financial assistance. To Prof. David Kaylor, our thanks are due not only for intellectual but also financial participation in the publication.

We are thankful to Sri B. D. Somani of West Coast Paper Mills for supplying us the required paper at concessional rates. We owe our thanks to Mr. J. Mohan for painstaking proof reading and to Hoe & Co. Madras, our printers, who through the able Mr. V. Sethuram and his devoted staff have spared no pains is seeing to the timely and fine execution of printing.

Bombay. K. K. A. VENKATACHARI,
7th February, 1981. *Founder Director.*

TAṈIYAṈ

(1) [*Invocation by Śrīman Nāthamuni]

Bhaktāmṛtaṁ viśvajana anumodanaṁ
Sarvārthadam Śrī Śaṭhakopa Vāṅgmayaṁ
Sahasra śākhopaniṣad samāgamaṁ
Namāmyahaṁ drāvida Veda Sāgaraṁ.

Translation

Worship do I the Ocean of Tamil Vedas,
The aggregate of the Upaniṣads, having thousands of branches, spelt out by Śaṭhakopa,
The ambrosia for God-lovers,
Which regales all alike [the denizens of the Universe as well as the Supreme Lord, the granter of all felicities]

Note

Tiruvāymoḻi is likened to an ocean. Once upon a time, the ocean was churned and the ambrosia, that came up, was offered to the Devas, the Lord's devotees. Likewise, Tiruvāymoḻi feeds the devotees with the nectarean sweetness of its contents. Again, the ocean delights the beholders, one and all, any length of time. Similarly, Tiruvāymoḻi, the 'Drāviḍa Veda Sāgaraṁ', regales one and all in the whole Universe, from the Supreme Lord downwards, without satiety.

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* Invocations (Taṉiyaṉ) (1) to (6) comprising one Sanskrit Śloka and five Tamil verses, composed by the devotees of Saint Nammāḻvār, do not form part of the Text of Tiruvāymoḻi, as such, but are, as a rule, recited at the commencement of the chanting of Tiruvāymoḻi.

(2) [Invocation by Īśvaramuni]

Tiruvaḻuti nāṭeṉṟum Teṉkurukūreṉṟum
Maruviṉiya vaṇporunaleṉṟum — arumaṟaikaḷ
Antāti ceytāṉaṭiyiṇaiyē eppoḻutum
Cintiyāy neñcē teḷintu.

Translation

My mind! thou shalt, for ever, contemplate, as your sole refuge,
The feet of the one [Saint Nammāḻvār], who rendered the abstruse Sanskrit Veda, in lucid Tamil verses,
Skilfully composed, adoring, as well, his birthplace, namely,
Teṉkurukūr, in the region called *Tiruvaḻuti* and the exhilarating river *Tāmraparṇi* on whose bank it stands.

(3) [Invocation by Coṭṭainampi]

Maṉattālum vāyālum vaṇkurukūr pēṇum
Iṉattāraiyallātiṟaiñcēṉ — taṉattālum
Ētum kuṟaivilēṉ — Entai Caṭakōpaṉ
Pātaṅkaḷ yāmuṭaiya paṟṟu.

Translation

Leaning, as I do, on the feet of Śaṭhakopa, my Sire,
I am above wants; I shall adore none
But those whose mind and mouth venerate *Tirunakari*,
His birth place.

(4) [Invocation by Aṉantālvāṉ]

Ēynta peruṅkīrtti yirāmāṉuca muṉitaṉ
Vāynta malarppātam vaṇaṅkukiṉṟēṉ — āyntaperum
Cīrār Caṭakōpaṉ Centamiḻvētam tarikkum
Pērāta uḷḷam peṟa.

Translation

I adore the comely feet of Saint Rāmānuja of unrivalled fame,
So as to acquire a mind which shall stand rivetted to the Chaste Tamil Vedas,
Yielded by Caṭakōpaṉ, the repository of all auspicious qualities,
Absolutely free from all blemishes.

(5) and (6) [Invocation by Śrī Parāśara Bhaṭṭar]

Vāṉtikaḻum cōlai matiḷaraṅkar vaṇpukaḻmēl
Āṉṟa tamiḻ maṟaikaḷāyiramum — Īṉṟa
Mutaltāy Caṭakōpaṉ — moympāl vaḷartta
Itattāy Irāmāṉucaṉ.

Translation

Caṭakōpaṉ was the mother, who yielded the Tamil Vedas, in a thousand stanzas, extolling the glory of *Araṅkar* (Lord Raṅganātha), Enshrined in the walled city of Śrīraṅgam, surrounded by luxurious orchards;
Rāmānuja is, however, the beneficent foster-mother,
Who sedulously nurtured these songs and made them flourish in our midst.

Mikkaviṟai nilaiyum meyyāmuyir nilaiyum
Takkaneṟiyum taṭaiyāki — tokkiyalum
Ūḻviṉaiyum vāḻviṉaiyum Ōtum Kurukaiyar Kōṉ
Yāḻiṉicai vētattiyal.

Translation

The tuneful songs of Tiruvāymoḻi of Vedic excellence,
Composed by Nammāḻvār, the chieftain of Kurukūr,
Elucidate the *nature of the Supreme Lord.*
The *nature of the eternal soul* (*Jīvā*), *the means for attaining the Lord,*
The end or the final goal and the impediments thereto.

Note

These five topics dealt with in Tirumantra, (Aum Namo Nārāyaṇāya) are elaborated upon, time and again, in Tiruvāymoḷi. The Lord is Supreme, the individual souls are His sole servitors, loving surrender unto His Sweet grace, the sole means of attaining Him, the deceitful knowledge, resulting in the individual soul straying away into the domain of sensual pleasures through the media of the foul bodies, constitutes the impediment to the attainment of the Lord, service to the Lord, without break or blemish, is the ultimate goal.

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VOLUME I

Tiruvāymoḻi

First Centum – First Tiruvāymoḻi (I-1)
(Uyarvu aṟa Uyar Nalam)

Note

This work comprises ten centums, or hundred decades, each of which is called a 'Tiruvāymoḻi', which means 'Inspired utterance' as well as 'Divnie speech', the speech from the holy mouth of the Saint. This is a skilled poetic composition in which each stanza begins with the closing word of the previous stanza or the phonetic sound thereof. Unlike the other hymns of the 'Divya Prabandha', Tiruvāymoḻi is accorded the special status of being chanted only inside the temples or at homes when the Deity is seated for congregational worship, and not when the Deity is taken out in the streets in ceremonial procession.

Preamble

In the opening song, the Saint exhorts his chastened mind to adore the dazzling, distress-dispelling feet of the Lord, the Supreme Benefactor, and attain salvation. Right at the very start, and that too in the opening line itself, the Āḻvār characterises God as one with perfections, all of the nature of bliss and love, the natural repository of innumerable auspicious traits of unlimited dimensions and thus easily scores over the 'Upaniṣad', which made a futile attempt to gauge the immeasurable bliss of the Supreme Lord and had to acknowledge defeat.*

Such a beginning is the natural corollary to the manner in which the Lord captivated the Āḻvār. It was by exhibiting His innumerable auspicious qualities that the Lord attracted

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* Yato vāco nivartante aprāpya manasāsaha.

the Āḻvār, and therefore it was that he began with an ardent adoration of those very qualities, literally strangling those philosophising on a God devoid of form, attributes etc. as the illustrious Kūrattāḻvāṉ would put it. Exulting over the fact that we have, on Saint Nammāḻvār's authority, a God of attributes, which ought to silence all those who philosophise on a God devoid of attributes, Kūrattāḻvāṉ would say Viṣṇupurāṇa (VI-5-84) corroborates this: it says the Lord is the essence possessing all blissful perfections. Does not Karṇa say, in the Bhiṣmaparva of the Mahābhārata, that even if all the worlds were assembled together and they were all to praise the perfections of the great victorious Viṣṇu (born as Kṛṣṇa, son of Vasudēva, bearing the discus, conch and sword) for millions of years it would not be exhaustive ? Did not Tārā tell Vāli, her husband, that, in Rāma, the noblest glories meet? Again, did not the subjects, assembled in King Daśaratha's court, proclaim that in all the earth none possessed the excellence of Rāma who, richly blest with graces, was to their hearts very dear? In the eleventh verse of his 'Stotra Ratna', Saint Yāmuna describes the Lord as one possessing an infinitude of super-excellent, auspicious perfections, conformable to His divine character".

It may, however, be questioned how the Āḻvār relegated himself to the lower order of submission to the Lord through an appreciation of His auspicious traits instead of being automatically linked up with the Lord by virtue of the inherent trait (Śeṣatva or servitude) of the Individual Soul, as His eternal servant. Actually, it is not a case of relegation, as such, and it has to be taken that all the noblest qualities that converge in the Lord constitute yet another tangible source of attraction for the individual soul. That there has been no departure from the basic stand of Master-servant relationship between the Lord and the Āḻvār is brought out clearly in the fifth centum, third Tiruvāymoḻi, fifth stanza (indicated here and elsewhere by the notation V-3-5). There, in a moment of desolation caused by the snapping of his communion with the Lord, Nammāḻvār bitterly reproaches the Lord as extremely selfish, unsympathetic, elusive, time-serving, deceitful, unfathomable etc.

and yet he finds his 'tyrannical' mind clinging to the Lord, as the Sole Refuge, under all circumstances. The examples of Lakṣmaṇa and Sītā can also be brought in here, to clarify the stand of the Āḻvār. According to his own admission to Hanumān when Lakṣmaṇa first met him in the mountain slope of Ṛśyamūkha parvata,* Lakṣmaṇa was enthralled into serving Śrī Rāma and following him, even in exile, by the latter's sweet qualities. This does not, however, detract from Lakṣmaṇa's basic stance. Being an incarnation of Ādiśeṣa (first servant), Lakṣmaṇa was devoted to Rāma, right from the cradle.†

And in the above context, Lakṣmaṇa merely adduced yet another consideration for his constant attendance on Rāma. Service unto the Lord by virtue of the essential nature of the individual soul (Śeṣatva), not conditioned by any extraneous consideration or inducements is, no doubt, of primary importance and all else is relegated to a secondary place. At the same time, it has to be noted that the Lord and His excellence can never remain apart. Felicitating Sītā on her fidelity to her husband (giving up the Palace and all its wealth and relatives and following Rāma into exile), Anasūyā Dēvi, wife of Sage Atri, exhorted that the husband needs to be venerated as God Himself, be he in town or wood, well or ill. Swayed by modesty, the bashful Sītā stood with down-cast eyes and spoke out: " My love for Rāma is spontaneous and yet, people are likely to construe that I love him because of his excellence, both physical and mental. It is indeed difficult for me to prove that my fidelity to Rāma has no strings attached to it and stands by itself without any external provocation or inducements, as Rāma and his excellence can never remain apart. My fidelity will remain constant even if he were the exact reverse of what he is ".

The philosophy of 'Tattva' (truth), 'Hita' (Path) and 'Puruṣārtha' (goal), elucidated in this work, is presented in a summarised

* " Ahamasyāvaro bhrātā guṇair dāsyam upāgataḥ ".

† Bālyāt prabrti susnigdha.

form, in the opening stanza itself, by indicating that 'Tirumāl' (Mahāviṣṇu) is the Supreme Lord, worshipping His lustrous feet, the Supreme path, and attainment of those very feet, through His redemptive grace, the highest goal. What a grand start, going straight to the subject on hand! Of the five-fold manifestations of God, namely, 'Para', Vyūha', 'Vibhava', 'Antaryāmi' and Arcā', this decad deals with the 'Para' or the transcendental Form of the Lord and the cognate activities.*

* Actually, the first two decads of this great work embrace all that has been said in all the four cantos of the 'Brahma Sūtras', (the Mīmāmsaka Śāstra, already referred to in the Introduction), elucidated in Śrī Rāmānuja's Śrī Bhāṣya. The first six songs of the first decad cover the first Adhyāya of the Brahma sūtras, the next five songs of that decad convey the contents of the second Adhyāya of the Sūtras, the first eight songs of the second decad (Viṭumin) embrace the third Adhyāya of the sūtras and the next three songs of that decad summarise the fourth and the last canto of the Sūtras. Again, decads three to hundred of Tiruvāymoḷi only elaborate what is already set out in the first two decads.

BOOK I

First Centum—First Decad

Uyarvu aṟa uyar nalam Uṭaiyavaṉ evaṉ? avaṉ,
Mayarvū aṟa mati-nalam aruḷiṉaṉ evaṉ? avaṉ,
Ayarvu aṟum amararkaḷ atipati evaṉ? avaṉ
Tuyar aṟu cuṭar-aṭi toḷutu eḻu eṉ maṉaṉē. (I–1–1)

Translation

My mind, lift yourself up to the dazzling, *distress-dispelling* feet of the One, who is the Lord of the ever alert *Eternal Heroes*, who is the natural repository of super-excellent traits which cut out all fatigue, and who unto me vouchsafed *wisdom-love*, ridding me of *ignorance*, leaving no trace of it behind.

Notes

(i) *Distress-dispelling feet*: Tradition has it that this has a pointed reference to the comely feet of Lord Devarāja, enshrined in Śrī Hasti Śailam (Kāñcīpuram). Whereas all the other Ācāryas before Śrī Rāmānuja interpreted this phrase as "The feet that relieve the distress of the yearning votaries", Śrī Rāmānuja held that the Lord's feet relieve His own erstwhile distress over the sad plight of His subjects, sunk deep in the miserable mire of 'Samsāra', the dreadful cycle of birth and death, after relieving the distress of the latter.

(ii) *Eternal Heroes*: The 'Nitya Sūrīs', Ananta, Garuḍa, Viṣvaksena and other celestials, ever alert in the Lord's intimate service in Yonder Heavens, and ever free, in the sense that they never passed through the gruelling mill of 'Samsāra' the cycle of birth and death.

(iii) '*Matinalam*' in the original text means 'wisdom-love' which can be expanded as follows:

(*a*) God granted me 'wisdom' as well as 'love'.*

* Bhakti rūpāpanna Jñāna or intellectual love of God.

(*b*) The second interpretation ascribed to Śrī Parāśara Bhaṭṭar is: "God gave me loving wisdom or wisdom partaking of the nature of love to God, vigorous from the very root like the '*Karuṅkāli*' (a heavy wood-*Acasia catechu*). Whereas, in the case of others, love of God is a growth from acts of virtue, in the case of the Āḻvārs, such love was induced in them by God's spontaneous grace, and love to God, in this context, is none other than the heart and mind, perfectly blended and attuned to the loving service of God.

(*c*) Queried whether Nammāḻvār was one characterised by love to God (bhakti) or characterised by surrender to the will of God (prapatti), the great preceptor, Empār, replied that the saint had surrendered his will entirely to God and that love to God, in his case, was merely a habit by which he sustained himself, very different from the generality of us, who, while ostensibly resigned to His will, seek employment, too, for obtaining food, etc. In the Saint's case, Lord Kṛṣṇa was unto him everything—food, drink and every other luxury.

(iv) *Rid of ignorance*: Clear-cut knowledge, absolutely free from non-apprehension (*ajñāna*) or the error of mistaking the body for the soul, wrong apprehension (*anyatha-jñāna*) or the error of owing allegiance to other than the Supreme Lord (minor deities) and '*viparīta-jñāna*' (mis-apprehension or inverted apprehension), the error of thinking that the individual soul is the independent master and can enjoy itself (like the *kaivalya* class) whereas it is the sole servitor of the Lord, in whom vests the inviolable right to enjoy the former—such blemishless knowledge was dowered on the saint by the Lord's free Grace—an act of Grace galore!

Maṉaṉ-akam malam aṟa malarmicai eḻutarum
Maṉaṉ-uṇarvu aḷavu ilaṉ, poṟi-uṇarvuavai ilaṉ,
Iṉaṉ uṇar, muḻu nalam, etir nikaḻ kaḻiviṉum
Iṉaṉ ilaṉ, eṉaṉ uyir, mikunarai ilaṉē. (I–1–2)

Translation

The Supreme Lord, peerless at all times, past, present and future, the embodiment of bliss and knowledge in their perfection, much beyond the grasp of the senses, outside the ken of comprehension of even the thoroughly cleansed mind of the Yogi, He is my good soul. O my mind, lift yourself up to the dazzling, distress-dispelling feet of such a Great One.

Notes

(i) In the first stanza, it was said that there was none above the Lord. The doubt might, however, arise whether He has any equal and now it is declared that He has no equal either.

(ii) It might sound strange that the Lord is beyond the comprehension of even the 'Yogi', with a thoroughly cleansed mind; the fact is, even he can comprehend Him only as infinite and immeasurable, free from the limiting adjuncts of the other two entities (Tattvas), namely, 'Jiva' (individual soul or 'cit', that which perceives) and matter ('acit', that which does not perceive).

Ilaṉ atu, uṭaiyaṉ itu: eṉa niṉaivu ariyavaṉ;
Nilaṉiṭai vicumpiṭai uruviṉaṉ, aruviṉaṉ;
Pulaṉoṭu pulaṉ alaṉ, oḻivu ilaṉ; paranta aṉ
Nalaṉ uṭai oruvaṉai naṇukiṉam nāmē. (I–1–3)

Translation

Could He be said to possess that one and not this other thing? No, He pervades, without intermission, the entire Universe, the region high up as well as those below the earth at all times; He abides in all non-sentient things (matter), having form and size as well as the formless sentient beings within them all (individual

souls), and He is yet beyond the grasp of the senses. Blessed are we to have attained Him of peerless glory!

Notes

(i) The Lord was revealed in the first stanza, in His transcendental glory in the High Heavens and He is now described as the all-pervasive Internal Controller, dwelling in the heart of every one, even on this side of heaven, the land of dark nescience, for the sustenance of His '*līlā-vibhūti*' or the sportive universe.

(ii) Notwithstanding the king's sovereignty over the entire land, he and his royal consorts lovingly raise orchards and flower gardens as a matter of recreation, and tend them with special care. The sportive universe (*līlā vibhūti*) is a similar creation of the Lord, raised and retained at His volition.

Nām avaṉ ivaṉ uvaṉ, avaḷ ivaḷ uvaḷ evaḷ,
Tām avar ivar uvar, atu itu utu etu,
Vīm avai ivai uvai, avai nalam, tīnku avai,
Ām avai, āyavai, āyniṉṟa avarē. (I–1–4)

Translation

We, the masculine beings over here, as well as those at a distance, near at hand and in between, the feminine species similarly situated, all things collectively seen here, there and everywhere, what can be individually pointed out as this, that and the other, the non-sentient things, good, bad, perishable and imperishable, things that were, are and will be, all these subsist in Him. (In other words, all these are sustained, directed and controlled by him).

Avaravar tamatamatu aṟivu aṟi vakaivakai
Avaravar iṟaiyavar eṉa aṭi aṭaivarkaḷ;
Avaravar iṟaiyavar kuṟaivu ilar; Iṟaiyavar
Avaravar vitivaḻi aṭaiya niṉṟaṉarē. (I–1–5)

Translation

Different grades of people, with varying degrees of spiritual knowledge and calibre, seek favours from minor deities (*Agni*, *Indra* etc.) whom they propitiate as their God. If those deities, in turn, bestow the boons sought by their votaries, to the extent deserved by them, it is *only through the grace of the Supreme Lord*, (*Śrīman Nārāyaṇa*) who stays inside these deities (as their internal *controller*) and maintains them.

Notes

(i) The śāstras proclaim that the Supreme Lord (puruṣōttama) alone is the granter of all felicities and destroyer of all evils.*

(ii) But for the influx of the requisite power from the Supreme Lord, which maintains the minor deities in their respective positions of authority, the minor deities, by themselves, would be incapable of extending favours to their votaries and vouch-safing protection to them; if they did, all by themselves, it would indeed be just as miraculous as the earthen elephants and horses, stationed in battle array, in the precincts of the petty pagodas of demi-gods (*Śāsthā*), on the outskirts of villages and towns, actually going to battle—a veritable impossibility!

Niṉṟaṉar iruntaṉar kiṭantaṉar tirintaṉar,
Niṉṟilar iruntilar kiṭantilar tirintilar,
Eṉṟum ōr iyalviṉar eṉa niṉaivu ariyavar;
Eṉṟum ōr iyalvoṭu niṉṟa em tiṭarē. (I–1–6)

Translation

We have it on the firm authority of the Vedās, that it is our Supreme Lord, who controls and sustains the different postures of standing, sitting, lying and wandering about, of one and all, as well as their abstinance therefrom, Himself being immutable (undergoing no change whatsoever) and yet beyond specific scrutiny and comprehension.

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* "Na sampadam samāhare vibhatām vinivartane, samartho dhriśyate Kaścit tam vinā Puruṣottamaṁ."

Notes

(i) In stanzas 4 and 5, the Supreme Lord was shown to be the Sole Architect and Sustainer of the created world of differences (*līla vibhūti*) and now, in this stanza, He is declared to be the cause of motion as well as rest- '*pravṛtti*' as well as '*nivṛtti*'.

(ii) To a poser whether God, on Whom all our actions or motions are said to be dependent, is again required to bring our activity to rest, Empār replied in the affirmative and brought home the point by citing the example of sage Viśvāmitra, who had pushed King 'Triśaṅku', bodily, on to *Svarga*, arresting his fall therefrom and making him stay mid-way in the process.

Tiṭa vicumpu, eri, vaḷi nīr, nilam ivaimicaip
Paṭar poruḷ muḻuvatum āy, avai avaitoṟum
Uṭal micai uyir eṉak karantu, eṅkum parantuḷaṉ:
Cuṭar miku curutiyuḷ ivai uṇṭa curaṉē. (I–1–7)

Translation

The Supreme Lord, enshrined in the shining śruti (scriptures-Vedās) is the Material cause of the basic elements of '*ākāśa*' (ether), air, fire, water and earth, which combined to usher in the worlds, with a vast variety of colours and forms; He pervades them all, in and out, like unto the soul inside the body and remains invisible; He contains them all inside His stomach (during the period of deluge).

Note

The preceding stanzas, which declare that God is all-in-all, might smack of monistic philosophy, making it out that God is the one and only entity from whom all things emanated, which are thus merely His manifestations. Now it is clarified that the Lord is apart from the non-sentient things and sentient beings and enters them all as 'Antaryāmin' (Internal Controller), like unto the soul inside the body, an enunciation based on no less than the authority of the

scintillating Vedās. (*Herein lies the key to the Viśiṣṭādvaita philosophy*).

Curar aṟivu-aru nilai viṇ mutal muḻuvatum
Varaṉ mutalāy, avai muḻutu uṇṭa paraparaṉ
Puram oru mūṉṟu erittu, amararkkum aṟiviyantu,
Araṉ ayaṉ eṉa, ulaku aḻittu amaittu uḷaṉē. (I–1–8)

Translation

The Supreme Lord is beyond the comprehension of even Brahmā and other *Curar* (Devas); He is the material cause of the primordial matter, the other elements and all that exist, and safeguards them all inside His Stomach during the period of deluge; He is the one who (functioning through Śiva) destroyed the three unique flying citadels. He is the propagator of knowledge to the *Amarar* (Devas) through Brahmā; He creates the worlds and dissolves them through *Ayaṉ* (*Brahmā*) and *Araṉ* (*Śiva*) standing within them (as their Inner Self).

Note

It has been made out in the preceding stanzas that (1) Lord Mahāviṣṇu is the Supreme Lord, proclaimed, as such, by the Vedās and (2) He is the Soul of all that exist, controls their creation, sustentation and dissolution. All these might appear to be one-sided, displaying a marked partiality for Mahāviṣṇu, ignoring the claims of the Stalwārts like Brahmā, Rudra and other powerful Devas, who have to their credit several achievements, such as creation of the worlds and dissolution thereof, destruction of the flying citadels of the three tough demons, etc. By way of dispelling the superficial belief and knowledge that Mahāviṣṇu is but a co-functionary, on a par with Brahmā and Rudra, that Mahāviṣṇu has the limited function of sustentation only, while the other two are the sole monarchs of their respective fields of creation and dissolution, it is now stated that all the three functions vest in Mahāviṣṇu alone, who gets them discharged through the appropriate authority. Śvetāśvatāropaniṣad clarifies that Brahmā emerged from the lotus flower that blossomed on the stalk sprouting from

Mahāviṣṇu's navel and was imparted by Him, the requisite knowledge of the Vēdās to carry on the work of creation and disseminate the Vēdās to others. As regards the function of dissolution, Rudra and Yama have their own limitations which Mahāviṣṇu transcends as their Inner Self, sustaining, directing and controlling them all.

Uḷaṉ eṉil uḷaṉ, avaṉ uruvam iv uruvukaḷ;
Uḷaṉ alaṉ eṉil, avaṉ aruvam iv aruvukaḷ;
Uḷaṉ eṉa, ilaṉ eṉa, ivai kuṇam uṭaimaiyil,
Uḷaṉ iru takaimaiyoṭu, oḻivu ilaṉ parantē. (I–1–9)

Translation

Be it said (as *the theists say*), " He is," or (as the *atheists say*) "He is not", (both ways) His existence is established. He exists, at all times and in all places together with the aggregate of the formless sentient beings and the non-sentient things with shape and size, both in the gross state (embodied and therefore visible) and in the subtle state (disembodied and therefore objectively imperceptible).

Notes

(i) The theists (Vaidikas) are those, who subscribe to the authority of the Vēdās;

(ii) The atheists (Nāstikas) are those who deny the existence of God. Denial can and ought to be only with respect to a thing, which forms the subject of such denial. That thing should be there, at least notionally, as ' nothing ', as such, does not warrant denial, rather needs no denial. Thus, this stanza cuts across the exponents of ' Śunya Vāda ' or the doctrine of nothingness. The Upaniṣadic text ' *asat* vā idamagra āsīth ' refers to the invisible subtle state (too subtle to be visible), when this world which forms Brahman's body was gradually reabsorbed into Brahman, each constituent element being refunded into its immediate cause. The word 'asat' italicized in the text, does not connote a state of nothingness or non-existence but the ' subtle ' state as distinguished from the gross or visible, manifest state.

Paranta taṉ paravaiyuḷ nīrtoṟum parantuḷaṉ
Paranta aṇṭam itu eṉa: nilam vicumpu oḻivu aṟak
Karanta cil iṭantoṟum iṭam tikaḷ poruḷtoṟum
Karantu, eṅkum parantuḷaṉ; ivai uṇṭa karaṉē. (I–1–10)

Translation

The Lord pervades every little bit of the oceanic waters, cool and sprawling (and yet does not feel cramped but, on the other hand), He feels as easy there as in the expansive world outside. Either on earth or the upper regions (in the whole universe) there is no place where He is not immanent, dwelling, as He does secretly, in the heart of all things and being however minute, and in all places (imperceptible to the things and beings pervaded by Him ever firm and eternal). He is the Lord, who contains them all within Himself, during the period of deluge (in the state of dissolution).

Notes

(i) The Individual Soul, of the size of a minute speck, pervades the body it gets into, only by dint of its attributive consciousness; in the very nature of things, it cannot be co-extensive and co-expansive with the body it occupies, like God, who is omnipresent, not being conditioned by any limiting adjuncts of the other two entities, namely, spirit (Jīva) and matter.

(ii) The doubt as to how the Lord can pervade the inside out of the Individual Soul, of the size of a mere speck (sub-atomic) gets automatically resolved, seeing that the Lord, in but a juvenile form, contains all the worlds during the period of deluge—if the golden stomach, which devoured all the butter stored up by the damsels in the pastoral village of Gokul, could contain within it all the worlds as well, why should one doubt the Lord's power of pervasion of the minutest of things, both in and out?

Kara vicumpu, eri, vaḷi, nīr, nilam: ivaimicai
Varaṉ-navil, tiṟal, vali, aḷi, poṟai āyniṉṟa
Paraṉ aṭimēl kurukūrc caṭakōpaṉ col
Niral-niṟai āyirattu ivai pattum vīṭē. (I–1–11)

Translation

The foregoing ten stanzas, out of the thousand, rich alike in sound and substance (matter and manner of expression), sung by Caṭakōpan of Kurukūr, in adoration of the Glorious Feet of the Supreme Lord, the great Contriver and Controller of the five elements, the spatial ether, air, fire, water and earth, with their respective basic qualities of sound, force, heat, chillness and endurance, shall lead (the chanters on) to 'Mōkṣa' (final emancipation from the bondage of 'Saṃsāra', the terrific cycle of birth and death).

Notes

(i) This sets the pattern of the entire work, the last stanza of each decad indicating the benefits accruing to one who chants the songs in the decad and/or learns the meanings thereof. One might wonder how the Saint could refer to the size of the work, as comprising thousand stanzas right at the start. Well, there are two ways of looking at it, namely,

(*a*) as one whose knowledge was fully inspired by God, he knew that he would reel off a thousand stanzas; and

(*b*) the poet could not sustain himself except by singing a thousand songs in adoration of the Lord, and thus it was a matter already contemplated by him, a resolu-ion, as it were, to sing as many songs.

(ii) Summing up, in this stanza, the decad as a whole, the Saint has made it abundantly clear that our salvation lies in seeking refuge at the Lord's Feet, the path of loving surrender to God being the central theme of the whole work, otherwise known as '*Dīrgha Śaraṇāgati*'. Actually, the first decad is the epitome of the entire hymnal, even as the first three stanzas of this decad sum up the topic of the whole decad while the first stanza is the quintessence of the first three stanzas and the opening line of the first stanza, the brilliant summary thereof.

First Centum Second Decad (I-2)
(Viṭumiṉ muṟṟavum)

Preamble

The transcendental glory of the Supreme Lord, His Supremacy as the material cause as well as the efficient cause and final cause of all life and being, the fact of His being the one and only Giver, either directly or through other minor deities, whose favours their respective votaries seek, His lustrous Feet being the sure and certain means of salvation for one and all, all these having been revealed to the Saint by the Lord Himself, the Saint revelled in this blissful knowledge, in the preceding Tiruvāymoḷi. Far from being selfish and self-centred, he wanted to share all this knowledge with his fellow beings, as a matter of mutual joy and enlightenment. But, alas! he found them all steeped in worldly life, just the very reverse of what he was. And yet, He would not lose heart. Banking on their inherent capacity to discriminate between good and bad things, he now exhorts them to give up the elusive and obnoxious pleasures of worldly life, disengage themselves from the erroneous notions of 'I' and 'Mine' and dedicate themselves to the apprehension of the limitless wealth and splendour of the Supreme Lord and reap the rich harvest of eternal bliss and beatitude. In this decad, the Āḻvār also teaches that true renunciation is of the mind, as distinguished from mere bodily displacements, such as fleeing away from the haunts of men and living a secluded life in a forest. No place is safe and impregnable to the invasion of temptations which could molest the mind, as seen from the examples of Ādi-Bharatā (Jaḍa-Bharatā) and Śoubhari. The Āḻvār exhorts, in the third stanza of this decad, as follows:

> "Pluck out the disease of 'I-ness' and 'My-ness',
> right from the roots and join the Lord".

Renunciation, therefore, lies in disengaging one's mind from the erroneous notions of 'I' and 'Mine' and surrendering oneself, *in toto*, to the will of God. Examples of such mental renunciation are found in King Janaka and Saint Kulacēkara. Did not the former say, unaffected by the illusory fire inducted by Sage Śuka, "Mithilāyāṁ pradagdhāyāṁ na me kiñcitpradahyate?"*

* If Mithilā is burnt, it is Mithila burnt; what is it to me"

Kulacēkara Āḻvār sang, in his 'Perumāḷ Tirumoḻi, IV decad:

Stanza 5:

"This realm, with all its wealth, I abjure,
Riding the elephant in rut, frightful to behold;
The blessing of being a shrub, I implore,
At lovely Tiruvēṅkaṭam, abode of my Liege, Lord".

Stanza 7:

"Little do I value being a King of Kings,
all that name and fame,
Holding sway under a single parasol,
white as the full moon;
Instead, 'tis my earnest will that I should,
as a jungle stream,
Course through Tirumalai, with its honey-
studded flower gardens".

Vīṭumiṉ muṟṟavum; vīṭu ceytu, um uyir
Vīṭu uṭaiyāṉiṭai vīṭu ceymmiṉē. (I–2–1)

Translation

Give up, *in toto*, [all that militates against holding a rapport with God] and giving up thus, surrender yourself unto (Him) the Custodian [the great Ordainer and Granter] of Heaven.

Notes

(i) Śrīman Nārāyaṇa is the Granter of Heaven, and yet the Āḻvār has not straightaway revealed that Holy Name, just to set the mind (of the listener) on to enquire, that is, stimulate spiritual investigation. Actually, the revelation comes in the tenth stanza.

(ii) What is emphasised in this stanza is the sacrifice of the worldly appetites to the surpassing love and beauty of God, the supreme preference to God, as against the adulteration of the senses towards earthly disposition.

If giving up has been mentioned first and surrender to the Lord next, one has to appreciate this sequence in the context of a child holding by the hand a live snake, and the elders around crying out: "*Drop it* down, *drop it* down, it is a snake!" Another example would be a passer-by, seeing a house on fire, exhorts the inmates of the house, "*Come out, come out*, your house is on fire". The emphasis thus rests on that which is to be eschewed, it being obnoxious, the very antithesis of the Lord to whom we owe undivided allegiance.

Miṉṉiṉ nilai ila maṉ uyir ākkaikaḷ;
Eṉṉum iṭattu, Iṟai uṉṉumiṉ nīrē. (I–2–2)

Translation

You will do well to pause for a while and discover for your selves that the bodies the souls get into [and look upon as the media for the enjoyment of sensual pleasures] last no more than the (fleeting) lightning.

Nīr numatu eṉṟu ivai vērmutal māyttu, Iṟai
Cērmiṉ; uyirkku atan nēr niṟai Illē. (I–2–3)

Translation

Cutting out, root and branch, all sense of 'You' and 'Yours' join the Lord; there is nothing as good as that for the Souls [there can be no greater felicity than that].

Note

It would indeed be difficult to enumerate the thousand and odd things to be eschewed and discarded. And so, the poet just tackles the root causes of all the evils, which have to be eradicated *in toto*. Instead of wording as 'I' and 'Mine', the Āḻvār has cautiously put it in the second person, as 'You' and 'Yours', in this stanza, lest the very things he abhors and advises others to eradicate should corrupt him

even at the mere mention thereof, in the first person—the risk of getting his tongue blistered, avoided.

Illatum uḷḷatum allatu avaṉ uru;
Ellai il an nalam: pulku, paṟṟu aṟṟē. (I–2–4)

Translation

Renouncing all else, seek Him (*Iśvara*) of *limitless* bliss, very different from the [seemingly] non-existent [fleeting and ever-changing] material things and the ever-existing (non-changing) sentient beings [with their limiting adjuncts].

Note

An inexhaustible fountain of bliss that the Lord is, one has to attach oneself to such a fountain, only through a complete severance of attachment to the ephemeral and illusory worldly pleasures and distractions, with uncompromising rigidity; hence, this advice of the Āḻvār to the fellow-beings.

Aṟṟatu paṟṟu eṉil, uṟṟatu vīṭu uyir;
Ceṟṟu atu maṉ uṟil, aṟu iṟai paṟṟē. (I–2–5)

Translation

Freed from worldly attachments, the Soul attains emancipation [from the erstwhile bondage]; however, shunning that [menacing state of self-enjoyment, known as *kaivalya mokṣa*], seek firmly the [bliss of eternal service to the Supreme] Lord, with exclusive devotion unto Him.

Note

Mere liberation from bondage resulting in a state of the lustrous soul getting lost in self-enjoyment (*kaivalya mokṣa*) is yet another hurdle, very menacing indeed, to be got over, being a serious impediment to the far superior and blissful experience of service unto the Lord on the yonder side of heaven, this '*kaivalya*' state also deserves to be shunned and discarded.

Paṟṟu ilaṉ-īcaṉum, muṟṟavum niṉṟaṉaṉ;
Paṟṟu ilaiyāy, avaṉ muṟṟil aṭaṅkē. (I–2–6)

Translation

Īcaṉ (the Supreme Lord), being solely attached to His devotees, He is All-in-One' (everything) unto them. And so, [ye worldlings]! hold on to Him and get absorbed in serving Him exclusively.

Note

Thinking that the worldlings (whom the Āḻvār addresses) might have their own misgivings about the easy accessibility of the Supreme Lord, Whom they are being asked to court and venerate, the doubt is being cleared in this stanza. Side by side with overlordship there is in Him the astounding quality of amazing simplicity, which predominates and makes it appear that this is His natural trait, and the other quality of Supremacy is super-imposed, rather serving as a foil against which the former shines all the more.

Aṭaṅku eḻil campattu aṭaṅkak kaṇṭu, Īcaṉ
Aṭaṅku eḻil aktu eṉṟu aṭaṅkuka uḷḷē. (I–2–7)

Translation

Realise that all this exceedingly enchanting cosmic wealth, you behold, is that of *Īcaṉ* [and that you are but a part of that]; [with this sense of belonging] it behoves you to blend yourself into it.

Notes

(i) No doubt, it was duly emphasised in the preceding stanzas that the Lord's native simplicity is far more pronounced than His overlordship, might and majesty. But the very thought of His majesty puts us, the insignificant tiny little beings nowhere, just like a bit of straw drifting on the bosom of the mighty ocean, being borne back to the shore by the curling waves. But

all this fear would vanish when we realise that we form part of His possessions and are thus rightfully entitled to approach Him, in love, without fear of such vast distance existing between Him and us, as between the ocean and the straw.

(ii) The miraculous change wrought by this sense of belonging has been happily illustrated by that great Preceptor, Nañcīyar, as follows:

(*a*) A merchant went overseas for trading leaving his wife behind in an advanced state of pregnancy. A son was born to them and grew up nicely. Years rolled on and yet the merchant did not come back home. There was an exhibition in a neighbouring place at which the little boy took up a stall and sold his wares. Just then, the aforesaid merchant also returned from abroad and took up a neighbouring stall. There arose a quarrel, one of those days, over the encroachment of goods in their booths and when it grew violent a passer-by, who knew them both, pointed out that the elderly merchant was quarrelling with his own son. Hostilities ceased immediately and gave place to mutual remorse, with the happy *reunion* of father and son.

(*b*) It was a lovely garden and the Prince had a great mind to enter it. But then, he was afraid of trespassing into somebody's garden and, therefore, stood hesitatingly at the entrance. However, as soon as some one said, "This garden belongs to your father, the King", all fear vanished and he dashed inside, roamed about and enjoyed to his heart's content. So does our fear to approach the Almighty vanish as soon as we realise that we are His children, the natural objects of His boundless love.

Uḷḷam urai ceyal uḷḷa im mūnṟaiyum
Uḷḷik keṭuttu, Iṟai-uḷḷil oṭuṅkē. (I–2–8)

Translation

With true awareness that the triple faculties of mental apprehension, speech and bodily actions, already at your command, are meant to be solely dedicated to *Iṟai* (the Lord), place them at His exclusive service, duly divested of all their erstwhile misplaced attachments and inhibitions.

Oṭuṅka avaṉkaṇ, Oṭuṅkalum ellām
Viṭum; piṉṉum, ākkai viṭumpoḻutu eṇṇē. (I–2–9)

Translation

Once you (realise your true relationship with God, He, as the Proprietor and you, as His property and) dedicate yourself to Him (with this awakening), all your sins (which kept you away from Him, so long) will cease; (once the cause ceases, the effect, namely, the body which tethers you will automatically cease) await then, the day when the physical body falls off.

Note

As soon as the body drops off, salvation, sure and certain, waits at the door of one who entrusts oneself to the Lord's keeping, with the spiritual awakening, as above.

Eṇ perukku an nalattu oṇ poruḷ-īṟu ila
Vaṇ pukaḻ Nāraṇaṉ tiṇ kaḻal cērē. (I–2–10)

Translation

Seek ye, the mighty feet (the sure haven of all) of Nāraṇaṉ, who is, at once, the abode of countless souls of vast excellence and an inexhaustible fountain of bliss, the repository of innumerable auspicious attributes.

Notes

(i) The Āḻvār concludes this, his first address to the fellow-beings, by teaching them how to pray, that is,

by giving out the substance of the eight-lettered 'Tirumantra', as above.

(ii) Kūrattāḷvāṉ, who was teaching Tiruvāymoḷi to his two sons, Bhaṭṭar and Śrīrāmappiḷḷai, stopped short when he came to this stanza, explanatory of the holy prayer (Tirumantra), which had to be taught by their constituted Guru, Śri Empār, residing in the same street, just a few houses off. Āḷvāṉ ordered the two youngsters to go to their Guru and learn the meaning of this stanza. Just as they were leaving, he called them back, saying:

"Stay! life is precarious and uncertain and one does not know who may live and who may die the next moment. You may, therefore, hear (the esoteric meaning of this verse) from myself." He then proceeded to explain to them the purport of this stanza which has a direct bearing on 'Tirumantra'. This only goes to emphasize that not a moment should be lost in learning the Science that will lead us to God, the more so, when human life is precarious and uncertain.

Cērttaṭat teṉ kurukūrc caṭakōpaṉ col
Cīrt toṭai āyirattu ōrtta ip pattē. (I–2–11)

Translation

These ten stanzas, out of the thousand, sung in accurate metrical composition, by Caṭakōpaṉ of Tirunakari, with lovely ponds, convey his well-thought-out message (for the uplift and emancipation of mankind).

First Centum—Third Decad (I-3)
(Pattu uṭai Aṭiyavar)

Preamble

In the first decad of this centum, the Āḷvār spoke of the Super-eminent glory of the Lord and, in the very next decad, he exhorted the worldlings to turn their minds God-ward and get absorbed in Him, with whole-hearted devotion. But then, they felt that they were no better than the man, lame of both hands, being required to mount an elephant. Now, in this decad, the Āḷvār puts them at ease by depicting the disarming simplicity of the Lord, like unto an elephant making itself so pliable as to enable even such a lame man to mount it easily. Speaking about the Supreme Lord's easy accessibility (saulabhya), the Āḷvār at once conjures up the vision of His being tied down to a mere pounder, when He, as Kṛṣṇa, the cowherd boy, got caught in the act of stealing butter—the very antithesis of His transcendent glory as the consort of Śrī Mahā Lakṣmī, residing on His winsome chest. Oh, what a contrast and what an amazing simplicity, which literally struck the poet dumb, nay, sent him into a deep trance, lasting six months! Here is an episode of episodes, melting down the hearts of the true devotees into running rivulets. As Śrī Vedānta Dēśika says, in his rapturous composition 'Yādavābhyudaya', mere contemplation of this episode leads to our release from bondage.

Pattu uṭai aṭiyavarkku eḷiyavaṉ, piṟarkaḷukku ariya
Vittakaṉ, Malarmakaḷ virumpum nam arumpeṟal aṭikaḷ
Mattu uṟu kaṭai veṇṇai kaḷaviṉil uraviṭai yāppuṇṭu
Ettiṟam, uralinōṭu iṇaintiruntu ēṅkiya eḷivē. (I–3–1)

Translation

Those who unto Him turn their minds, in utter devotion, He is easily accessible but is the Mystic, difficult of attainment by others. (Oh, what a wonder, as a mere infant, fondled by Yaśōdā and other damsels of Gōkul, he could vanquish the demoniac *Pūthanā*, *Śakaṭāśura* and a host of others!) Eagerly sought Malarmakaḷ (Śrī *Mahālakṣmī*), who emerged from the soft lotus flower and yet did not take to it kindly but took her abode on the broad and winsome chest of the Lord), what a marvel, our Lord, difficult to attain, was seen reduced to the abject position of a weeping child, fastened by the chest to a pounder (by *Yaśōdā*, as a punishment) for stealing butter off the churning rod-a paragon of simplicity galore!

Note

The Āḷvār is said to have gone into a trance for as many as six months, contemplating the amazing simplicity of the Supreme Lord, as brought out in this stanza.

Eḻivarum iyalviṉaṉ nilai varampu ila pala piṟappāy;
Oḻivarum muḻu nalam mutal ila, Kēṭu ila; vīṭu ām
Teḻitarum nilaimaiyatu oḻivu ilaṉ muḻuvatum; iṟaiyōṉ
Aḻivarum aruḷiṉōṭu akattaṉaṉ, puṟattaṉaṉ amaintē. (I–3–2)

Preamble

Tradition has it that Śrī Matura Kavi and several other savants, who had the great good fortune of listening to 'Tiruvāymoḻi' from the sacred lips of the Āḻvār, gathered round the insensate Āḻvār and eagerly awaited his return to his senses. It was after the lapse of a period of six months, that the Āḻvār recovered himself, took up the thread where he had left it and proceeded to expatiate on the Lord's aforesaid 'Saulabhya' (easy accessibility) by saying that He is simplicity itself (simplicity personified).

Translation

The Lord is the very personification of simplicity, which helps all His numerous auspicious qualities, without beginning or end, shine forth; having made innumerable descents without restriction of manner of birth and place of descent, it is always the Lord's prerogative to grant that cleansed and clarified state (known as '*Mokṣa*'). Shedding, with sweet spontaniety, His unlimited grace unto the devotees (and doing even odd jobs for them) He is beyond the reach of others (the inimical).

Amaivu uṭai aṟaneṟi muḻuvatum uyarvu aṟa uyarntu
Amaivu uṭai mutal keṭal oṭivu iṭai aṟa nilam atuām
Amaivu uṭai amararum, yāvaiyum yāvarum tāṉ ām,
Amaivu uṭai Nāraṇaṉ māyaiyai aṟipavar yārē? (I–3–3)

Translation

Who indeed can comprehend the wonderful secret of the descents (*Avatāras*) of (Lord) Nāraṇaṉ, the appropriate abode of all sentient beings including the 'Amaras' (the exalted Brahmā and other celestials) of outstanding eminence by virtue of their

moral attainments of a high degree and mental perfection, as well as the non-sentient things?

Note

None can indeed comprehend this divine secret, neither the ever-free, eternal angels (*Nitya Sūris*) in the yonder Heaven, totally immersed in the enjoyment of the Lord, in that transcendent setting nor the worldlings, engrossed in their pursuit after food and raiment nor even the *Āḻvārs*, although blest by the Lord with perfect knowledge, as they just get entranced by the mere contemplation of the Lord's astounding simplicity and thaw down.

Yārum ōr nilaimaiyaṉ eṉa aṟivu-ariya em perumāṉ,
Yārum ōr nilaimaiyaṉ eṉa aṟivu-eḷiya em perumāṉ,
Pērum ōr āyiram piṟa pala uṭaiya em perumāṉ,
Pērum ōr uruvamum uḷatu illai, ilatu illai piṇakkē. (I–3–4)

Translation

Our Sire, bearing a thousand (innumerable) names and (the) forms (appropriate thereto) can be comprehended, as such, (by the devotees, however meagre, their intelect and poor, their parentage); (on the other hand) the ungodly who bear no love for Him cannot comprehend His names and forms (however exalted be their knowledge and parentage); (And so), there is a perennial debate (between these two sets of people) one group affirming that the Lord goes by several names and forms and the other group asserting that He has none of these.

Piṇakku aṟa aṟu vakaic camayamum neṟi uḷḷi uraitta
Kaṇakku aṟu nalattaṉaṉ; antam il āti am pakavaṉ;
Vaṇakku ūṭait tavaneṟi vaḻi niṉṟu, puṟaneṟi kaḷaikaṭṭu,
Uṇakkumiṉ, pacai aṟa! avanuṭai uṇarvukoṇṭu uṇarntē. (I–3–5)

Translation

The eternal Lord, the lovely Primate possessing the Six principal attributes of *knowledge*, *strength*, *sovereignty*, *valour*, *power* and *splendour*) has set at naught the *six heretical philosophical doctrines* (*Śāṅkhya*, *Yōga*, *Kaṇāta*, *Bouddha*, *Jaina* and *Pāśupada*) by

setting forth the cream of the Vedic teachings in His 'Song celestial' (*Gīta*). Imbibing the quintessence of those teachings, stick to the path of loving surrender to His Sweet grace (*Prapatti mārgā*) to the exclusion of all the other paths of discipline, drying up, at the same time, the erstwhile springs of bodily pleasures *in toto* (not merely through non-indulgence in them but through a positive aversion thereto).

Note

As regards the concrete manner of worshipping the Supreme Lord, the Āḻvār, calls upon the fellow beings to tread the path of 'Bhakti' (God-love of melting tenderness of heart) indicated by the Lord Himself in His 'Song Celestial'.

Uṇarntu uṇarntu iḻintu akaṉṟu uyarntu uru viyanta iṉ ṉilaimai
Uṇarntu uṇarntu uṇarilum, iṟainilai uṇarvu aritu uyirkāḷ!
Uṇarntu uṇarntu uraittu uraittu Ari ayaṉ araṉ eṉṉum ivarai
Uṇarntu uṇarntu uraittu uraittu, iṟaiñcumiṉ maṉappaṭṭatu oṉṟē. (I–3–6)

Preamble

Worldlings to the Āḻvār:

"Oh, Saint, to us with limited knowledge, the Trinity, standing in a row, *Brahmā*, *Viṣṇu* and *Rudra*, appear to be all of the same stature. Pray, enlighten us, as to whether it is actually so or one of them is Superior to the other two or there is yet another Power superior to all the three, so that we may worship that Supreme Authority".

The Āḻvār's reply is as in this stanza, vide gist given below:

Translation

"For the *Jīvātmā* (individual Soul, with its innate intelligence and keen perception pervading far and wide), it is possible to know its own inherent nature and quality through a rigorous process of enquiry, intuition and contemplation. But a similar perception by the Individual Soul, of Iṟainilai (the Divine Nature, Īśvara Svarūpa) is hardly possible. (And yet) ye folks, better study intensely and dispassionately (the authoritative texts highlighting) the individual traits and course of conduct of *Ari* (Nārāyaṇa, *Ayaṉ* (Brahmā) and *Araṉ* (Rudra) and (in the process) fix your mind firmly on the one who impresses you as the Supreme Lord and worship Him (by reciting His names and the relative Mantras) with deep devotion. (Such a study will easily reveal that *Nārāyaṇa* is the Supreme, the Internal Controller of all, including *Brahmā* and *Rudra*, that He is wholly '*Sātvik*' while *Brahmā* and *Rudra* have a blend of '*Rājasik*' and '*tāmasik*' traits, He is the great Ordainer and the others are the ordained, so on and so forth).

Oṉṟu eṉap pala eṉa aṟivu-arum vaṭiviṉuḷ niṉṟa
Naṉṟu eḻil Nāraṇaṉ Nāṉmukaṉ araṉ eṉṉum ivarai
Oṉṟa num maṉattu vaittu, uḷḷi, num iru pacai aṟuttu
Naṉṟu eṉa nalam ceyvatu avaṉiṭai nammuṭai nāḷē. (I–3–7)

Translation

May you ponder in your mind, dispassionately, over the relative merits of the Gods. Nāraṇaṉ beaming through His auspicious attributes, firm and fine, Nāṉmukaṉ (the four-headed *Brahmā*) and *Araṉ* (*Rudra*), who look so much alike that it is difficult to comprehend whether they are one or many; may you also investigate (with the help of authoritative texts) and discern that there is but one God (and that is *Nārāyaṇa*, the Super-Soul residing in all, including *Brahmā* and *Rudra*); with this discovery you will do well to give up your allegiance to the other two (Brahmā and *Rudra*) as God and attach yourselves firmly to *Nārāyaṇa* (as the one and only God) during your life-time.

Nāḷum niṉṟu aṭu nama paḻamai am koṭuviṉai uṭaṉē
Māḷum, ōr kuṟaivu illai; maṉaṉ-akam malam aṟak kaḻuvi,
Nāḷum nam tiru uṭai aṭikaḷ-tam nalam-kaḻal vaṇaṅki,
Māḷum ōr iṭattilum vaṇakkoṭu māḷvatu valamē. (I–3–8)

Translation

If we cleanse our minds of the dirt (of misconceived notion of parity among the '*Thiru-Murties*', *Brahmā*, *Viṣṇu* and *Śiva*) through that bleaching agent, called wisdom, and worship daily at the felicitous feet of our Lord, the gracious consort of *Tiru* (*Śrī Mahālakṣmī*), all our past sins which had been tormenting us so far will die out at once, and we will be free from wants of any

kind. (It is never too late to switch on to the Lord thus.) better repose on His lap, even while dying.

Notes

(i) To a question supposed to have been put to the Āḻvār by his interlocutors, whether their accumulated, age-long sins will not operate as a serious impediment to their worshipping the Lord, this stanza provides the answer. No doubt, the Śāstras proclaim.* that one cannot but taste the fruits of one's actions; in other words, the sins can be liquidated only by the compulsory process of undergoing the prescribed sufferings. That is all right, so far as the potentiality of the reactions of one's own past Karma goes. But that can be no bar to the operation of the Lord's mighty grace, full and flooding, washing away all sins the moment one surrenders to Him, in the gracious presence of Mahālakṣmī, the Divine Mother. If past Karma is like the fire that burns out things, the Lord's grace is like the water that puts out fire.

(ii) Again, assuming that the worldlings further pleaded that time has run out already, and they have very little time left in the present span, the Āḻvār says that it is never too late; even if a decrepit old man dies, leaning forward on his stick, the Lord will be gracious enough to take it as an act of obeisance to Him. The Āḻvār stresses that it is better to bow unto Him, at least during the last moments of one's life, unlike Rāvaṇa whose creed was† not to bow unto any one till his death, and even while dying.

Valattaṉaṉ Tiripuram erittavaṉ, iṭamperat tuntit
Talattu eḻu ticaimukaṉ paṭaitta nal ulakamum tāṉum
Pulappaṭa, piṉṉum taṉ ulakattil akattaṉaṉ tāṉē;
Colap pukil, ivai piṉṉum vayiṟṟu uḷa; ivai avaṉ tuyakkē.
(I–3–9)

* 'Nābhuktaṃ Kṣayate Karma '.

† 'Na nameyam tu kasyacit'.

Translation

His (Lord Mahā Viṣṇu's) navel is the seat of *Ticai mukaṉ* (Brahmā), the creator of many a lovely world, while (*Rudra*) the (Ostensible) destroyer of the three (flying) citadels (and their demoniac chiefs) propitiates the Lord and gets allotted some space to the right, on His (the Lord's) broad, winsome chest (as a place of shelter, in any emergency). He (The Lord) also makes Himself visible to one and all, in the respective worlds (during His *Avatāras*).

In a manner of talking, these (great qualities of the Lord are innumerable, but) are kept in His stomach (undisclosed, far outnumbering those disclosed to us already); these are His enigmatic ways indeed.

Tuyakku aṟu matiyil nal ñāṉattuḷ amararait tuyakkum
Mayakku uṭai māyaikaḷ vāṉilum periyaṉa vallaṉ;
Puyal-karu niṟattaṉaṉ; peru nilaṅ kaṭanta nal aṭip pōtu
Ayarppilaṉ alaṟṟuvaṉ, taḻuvuvaṉ vaṇaṅkuvaṉ amarntē.
(I–3–10)

Translation

If aberrations are noticeable (now and then) in the mental attitudes of even those Amarars (*Celestials*) noted for clarity of knowledge and understanding) (like *Indra* and the 'Nitya Sūris', the ever free angels like *Garuḍa*), towards the supreme Lord, that is because the wonders (of His incarnation) exceed the bounds of the expansive sky and thus (easily) baffle them all. (Be that, as it may) I (on my part) shall unremittingly bow before the lovely feet of the cloud-hued Lord, which spanned the entire universe, embrace and extol them, with a mind wholly detached from all else.

Notes

(i) Speaking about the mental aberrations of even those exalted personages, here are two typical anecdotes: There was a time when the Devas were uprooted from their homes and their women folks were kidnapped by the Asuras. During His Avatāra, as Lord Kṛṣṇa, the Lord fought out the demons and restored the home and hearth to the Devas. While returning from that expedition, Śrī Kṛṣṇa took with Him a flower plant,

plucked out from Indra's garden, to be planted in His palace down below. The ungrateful Indra would, however, not tolerate it and, armed with his mace, he went in hot pursuit of the Lord to snatch the plant from Him.

(ii) And then, during the same Kṛṣṇāvatāra, Garuḍā came down to Earth in pursuit of a snake which, however, sought asylum in Lord Kṛṣṇa. Naturally, the Lord refused to release the snake when demanded by *Garuḍā*, and the latter made no secret of his resentment and uttered such harsh words as: "Is this the reward for my having carried you and your consorts on my shoulders all these years?"

Amararkaḷ toḻutu eḻa alai kaṭal kataintavaṉ-taṉṉai
Amar poḻil vaḷaṅ kurukūre caṭakōpaṉ kuṟṟēvalkaḷ
Amar cuvai āyirattu, avaṟṟinuḷ ivai pattum vallār
Amararōṭu uyarvil-ceṉṟu aṟuvar tam piṟavi am ciṟaiyē.
(I–3–11)

Translation

Those that are conversant with these ten songs, out of the thousand sung sweetly, as a piece of Divine Service, by Caṭakōpaṉ of Kurukūr, rich and resourceful, in adoration of the one (Supreme Lord) that churned the milk-ocean with its surging waves, exciting the warm admiration and deep reverence of the (otherwise self-centred) *Amarars* (*Devas*) will get released from the firm and formidable grip of (the cycle of) births and join the holy band of the *Amarars* (the celestials) in the High Heavens.

First Centum—Fourth Decad (I-4)
(Am ciṟaiya mata nārāy)

Preamble

The Sublime and the Sensual have always co-existed in both the worlds-the mundane and the spiritual. There is, however, a fundamental difference in their inter-relationship, in the respective spheres. In the material world, the two are mutually exclusive, being diametrically opposed to each other. In the spiritual world, that which, in the language of aesthetics, is termed as '*Śṛṅgār*', is nothing but the psychological imperative for man's consciousness moving towards Him (Super-Soul) of ravishing beauty (as *Bhāgavatā* bears out), just the very inversion of the skin-deep, carnal variety of lust, stamping out the human lover-beloved union. If the love-smitten Parāṅkuśa (Nammāḻvār, who was like unto a goad wearing round his spiritual antagonists through his scintillating hymns and making the Lord Himself pliable, enraptured by his sweet, love-laden hymns) turns out to be a female, expressing herself now as Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī (God-lover), then as the Mother, the intuitive gnostic friend of the love-lorn daughter trying to keep the latter under sobering restraint and sometimes as the soothing Mate, it is but the natural corollary to his boundless love for God and the deep yearning, beyond words, for the Divine presence and lasting union. Actually, the Lord is the only Male or Husband (*Loka bhartā*), the '*Puruṣottama*' the *Kṣetrajña*' and all the Individual souls are but marks of the feminine, the *Kṣetras*' (Location), the female centres of the creative activity of God. It is indeed quite some consolation that the lover-beloved theme is familiar ground for the worldlings and now, without adopting the austere Vedic approach, the Āḻvār would only want them to shift the base and turn the whole drama God-ward and be wholly absorbed in '*Daiva Rasa*' (spiritual love), the '*Brahmānubhava*'. Even as the female anatomy plays a key role in the earthly variety of love, in the spiritual world, '*Para Bhakti*', '*Para Jñāna*' and '*Parama Bhakti*', in the ascending scale of God-love, too deep for words, symbolise the breast of the God-lover, swelling up with God-love.

Songs attributed to the Mother and the Mate are all sung by the Āḻvār only. The Mate is the cementing force joining the lover and the Beloved; this Mate is only symbolic of the sense of fusion and belonging, the inalienable relationship of Master and Servant, between God and Man, inculcated by "*Praṇava*' (*Aum*) in '*Tirumantra*'. The Mother plays the role of '*Namaḥ*' in the said *Mantra* which puts an embargo on the Individual soul indulging in egoistic self-effort to attain God-head, instead of awaiting the descent of His grace. Thus, she prevents the love-intoxicated Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī from trespassing, that is, breaking all norms of correct feminine conduct, and keeps her under restraint. In this

decad, where the Āḻvār is seen transformed as 'Nāyaki' (female lover), some birds are sent bv her as emissaries to the Lord. This is the first of the four decads in the whole work, where messages are sent by the Āḻvār to the Lord, the other three being VI-1, VI-8 and IX-7. The winged birds typify the efficient preceptors possessed of the mighty wings, a happy blending of knowledge and conduct. This technique of the Āḻvār has been adopted by the subsequent poets as well. C. F. Kālidāsa's '*Meghadūta*' and Vedānta Deśika's '*Haṁsa Sandeśa*'. Parāśara Bhaṭṭar would exclaim: "The monkeys shot into fame with the advent of Śrī Rāma who employed Hanumān as His chosen emissary to Rāvaṇa's court; likewise the the Āḻvārs have made the winged birds famous by commissioning them to carry messages to their Beloved God".

The messages in the four decads, referred to above, were all despatched by the Āḻvār to the Lord but to different destinations, namely, (1) *Vyūha* or the milk-ocean, the seat of the Lord's creative activity, (ii) the *Vibhava* or the Lord's incarnate forms, (iii) '*Paratva*' (transcendent) and '*Antaryāmi*' (Internal Controller of all) and (iv) *Arcā* (Iconic manifestaion), in the chronological order. The Āḻvār is now in the same plight as Śakuntalā, left behind in the hermitage, after her initial meeting and union with King Duṣyanta and hence the necessity for this message invoking the Lord's special trait of forgiveness, by way of overlooking the drawbacks noticed by the Lord in the Āḻvār during their erstwhile union.

And to end this preamble precisely as it was begun, here is an interesting anecdote. When the great Preceptor, Nañcīyar was discoursing on this Tiruvāymoḻi, one of his listeners abruptly left the place, murmuring that the discourse had assumed the complexion of a sensualist's love-conversation. In the first three decads, the saint had expounded Divinity as the Exalted, the worship-worthy and the Easily-accessible. The listener in question appreciated these and observed: "Here is a grand theme, worthy of acceptance by the world-weary, and so long as it treats of the Almighty in His sublime character I am bound to listen to it, as a sensible man ought to". But, as soon as the Saint changed the Divine discourse into the form of love to God, love treated by analogies taken from the experience of mankind in this world, specially in its relation as Lover and the Beloved, Mistress and Spouse and so on, the disciple turned away from it, thinking that this kind of treatment

was a shock to good taste, outrage to his wisdom and a violence to his commonsense. Nañcīyar couldn't but deplore the failure of this unfortunate listener to see, in it, the explanation of the mysterious Divine Love (Bhakti), contained in the Commandment of the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka upaniṣad* (*Maitreyi Brāhmaṇa*, 44) to the effect that the Lord is to be lovingly, intensely meditated upon.

First Centum–Fourth Decad (I-4)

Am ciṟaiya maṭa nārāy! aḷiyattāy! nīyum niṉ
Am ciṟaiya cēvalumāy āā eṉṟu eṉakku aruḷi,
Vem ciṟaip puḷ uyarttārkku eṉ viṭū-tūtāyc ceṉṟakkāl,
Vaṉ ciṟaiyil avaṉ vaikkil, vaippuṇṭāl eṉ ceyumō? (I–4–1)

Translation

Ye young, sympathetic Stork, with pretty plumes, taking pity on poor me, go with your male partner and deliver my message to the Lord on whose banner Is (Garuḍa) that bird with formidable plumes; If perchance He puts you in prison tough, what does it matter if you were to suffer on my behalf?

Notes

(i) The white wading birds, stork, crane and heron employed by the Āḻvār as emissaries to God, signify the preceptors, absolutely pure, in and out, standing four-square against the temptations of worldly life, just like these birds with tremendous staying powers, taking up firm positions in the watersheds, coolly resisting the onslaught of the waves.*

(ii) It may be noted that the help of the male stork is solicited through the female, following the imperative need for seeking the Lord through the good offices of the Divine Mother, the grand Intercessor between God and man.

(iii) Putting the birds in prison should not be taken literally and, in fact, it is most unlikely that the Lord would ever

* Aphorism 154, Ācārya hṛdayam.

do so. It would indeed be worse than putting them in the toughest prison if He just remained cold and indifferent and would not even look at them, an experience comparable with that of the Princes not getting fed when hunger pinches them.

Eṉ ceyya tāmaraikkaṇ-perumāṉārkku eṉ tūtāy
Eṉ ceyyum uraittakkāl? iṉak kuyilkāḷ! nīr alirē?
Muṉ ceyta muḻuviṉaiyāl tiruvaṭikkīḻk kuṟṟēval
Muṉ ceyya muyalātēṉ akalvatuvō? vitiyiṉamē. (I–4–2)

Preamble

The love-intoxicated Āḻvār beckoned the stork pair, in the preceding stanza, to carry a message to the Lord but the contents of the message are now revealed by him to a band of Kōels. This kind of confusion only reveals the intensity of the Āḻvār's God-love, the ecstatic imbalance of mind.

Translation

Oh, ye happy band of Kōels, what will unto ye happen If you conveyed my message to my lotus-eyed Lord? Well, aren't you the familiar lot? should it be decreed That I, who, from His service, did all these days abstain because of my past sins, be still kept away from His feet?

Notes

(i) There are many points of comparison between the Kōels and the Ācāryas (preceptors).*

(ii) Here is an interesting anecdote to drive home the point that our accumulated sins cannot be washed off by our own efforts and that it is only the Lord's spontaneous grace that can cut the gordian knot and absolve us. Kōḷari Āḻvāṉ and Teṟkāḻvāṉ, two residents of the famous pilgrim centre, Tirukkōṭṭiyūr, in the South, met on an auspicious day, at a bathing ghat. The former demanded of the latter to wash off his sins by taking a dip in the sacred tank. Sharp came the rejoinder from the latter: "Think not, friend, that my sins will be washed merely by dipping in these waters once or twice. Unless the grace of Lord Saumya Nārāyaṇa (the presiding Deity of the place) descends on me and the discus in His hand destroys all my sins, all my personal exertions will be of no avail." Śrī Parāśara Bhaṭṭar, who happened to overhear the conversation was thence forward well impressed with Teṟkāḻvāṉ about whom he had no high opinion before, on a mere superficial estimate.

* See aphorism 153 of Ācārya Hṛdayam, wherein other birds such as parrots, peacocks have also been brought in.

Vitiyiṉāl peṭai maṇakkum meṉ-ṉaṭaiya aṉṉaṅkāḷ!
Matiyiṉāl Kuṟaḷ māṇāy ulaku iranta kaḷvarkku,
Matiyilēṉ val-viṉaiyē māḷātō? eṉṟu orutti
Mati ellām uḷ kalaṅki, mayaṅkumāl eṉṉīrē. (I–4–3)

Translation

You lucky pair of swans, with gentle gait, go and tell Him who, as the midget (Vāmaṇa), covertly got a donation of the worlds, that here lies one, whose sins are inexhaustible, in a terrible state of mental imbalance.

Notes

(i) *Lucky pair of swans or lucky Āḻvār?*

It is not so much the felicity of the swans that they remain duly mated, enjoying conjugal bliss, as the luck of the Āḻvār himself. But for their lucky state of existence they would not have been available now for employment by the Āḻvār. Although Śrī Rāma was bemoaning his separation from Sītā, he felt greatly relieved after he got Sugrīva restored to his wife and Kingdom. Even so, the Āḻvār deems himself lucky to see the swans in a happy state.

(ii) The swans are briefed by the Āḻvār to tell the Lord that the sins of the Āḻvār are inexhaustible and that His redemptive grace alone can deliver the goods, in case the Lord insisted that the Āḻvār should first liquidate his sins and then only join Him.

(iii) *Third line*: ' *here lies one* ': It is hardly necessary to disclose the name of this one by way of identification for the Lord jolly well knew His victim as none other than poor Parâṅkuśa Nâyakî, reduced to this critical state by their erstwhile union—

Eṉ nîrmai kaṇṭu iraṅki, itu takâtu eṉṉâta
Eṉ nila mukil vaṇṇaṟku eṉ colli yâṉ collukēṉō?
Naṉ-nîrmai iṉi avarkaṇ taṅkâtu eṉṟu oru vâyccol
Naṉ-nila makaṉṟilkāḷ! nalkutirō? nalkîrō? (I-4-4)

Preamble

Seeing that Parâṅkuśa Nâyakî was commissioning several birds, a few blue-tinted Aṉṟil (Cakravâka) birds approached her, as if to enquire whether they could also be of service to her. But the dejected lover that she was, she was struck down by the futility of sending a message to the Lord who remained aloof despite an intimate knowledge of her plight, her inordinate love for Him, during their erstwhile union and failed to see the injustice of the present separation. And yet, she asked the blue birds to apprise her blue-hued Lord of her precarious condition, with little or no chance of survival.

Translation

Ye Aṉṟil birds of sapphire hue!
Tell Him I am about to die, will you?
What have I to tell my cloud-hued Lord,
Who relents not, having seen how I fared
(During our union), and sees not, on his part
'Tis most unjust, from me to depart?

Note

When Sri Parâśara Bhaṭṭar was discoursing on this song, a Tamil Scholar contended that the expression, "having seen my plight", in the first line (original text) should be 'having heard of my plight'. His doubt was how, when they had already been locked in the joy of union, could God, one of the pair, see the signs of pain of the other, after separation. To this, Bhaṭṭar replied: " Don't you

know what the Tamil Savant Tiruvaḷḷuvar has said? The lady-love lay in tight embrace with her lover but, now and then, they got a little unlocked while turning on their sides; this slight distance between them was enough to make her lose the colour on her skin, a decolouration resulting from the gloom of separation! Again, in the poems of '*Kuṟuntokai*' it has been said, wherever, wherever the lover touched, there, there, a flush of colour arose; wherever, wherever the touch had ceased, there, there, the colour sank. The scholar could at once realise that the message in question only reminds the Lord of what He had Himself noticed during His erstwhile union with Parâṅkuśa Nâyakî.

Nalkit tâṉ kâttu aḷikkum poḻil ēḻum; viṉaiyēṟkē
Nalkat tâṉ âkâtō? Nâraṇaṉaik kaṇṭakkâl,
Malku nîrp puṉal-paṭappai irai tēr vaṇ ciṟu kurukē!
Malku nîrk kaṇṇēṟku ōr vâcakam koṇṭu aruḷâyē. (I-4-5)

Preamble

Parâṅkuśa Nâyakî begs of a heron to convey the following message to her beloved Lord:

" It matters not if I rot here, away from Him. But He is Nârâyaṇa who, by the very implication of that name, resides in all beings and sustains them all, unsought and unsolicited, with no exception whatsoever. Even the solitary exclusion of myself from the scope of His benevolent protection will jeopardise His position of eminence, His very name. It behoves Him, therefore, to avert this calamity. "

Translation

Ye little lovely heron, seeking food in water-logged flower gardens,
When you behold Nâraṇaṉ, the sole sustainer of the worlds seven,
Will you deign to tell Him that here is one,

With tearful eyes, a sinner He can't throw down,
And bring back any reply He chooses to send on?

Notes

(i) *Line* 4: *With tearful eyes*: Tears welling up and filling the eyes of the Āḻvār would, as it were, serve as an identification mark for him, whether in a state of separation from or union with the Lord. In the former case it would be tears of grief and in the latter, tears of Joy.

(ii) When a doubt was expressed as to how the Saints, soaked in God-love, could address the senseless birds to carry messages to God, the illustrious Nampiḷḷai replied: In affairs of love to God, even storks and stones can serve as messengers, albeit the party at the other end is as exalted as Sītā, the crown jewel of Janaka's clan. On one occasion, Parāśara Bhaṭṭar was informed of the death of a low-caste devotee in such ordinary language as "he has breathed his last." Bhaṭṭar at once admonished his informant and said that the news should have been worded as: "He bade farewell here to go and join the ranks of the celestials in Heaven." He added that caste is of no account, when good men go to God and so also, when messengers are for God, they may be even stones and plants, not to talk of the animate birds.

(iii) *Line* 4: '*a sinner He cannot throw down*': "Having roused my appetite for Him, where there was none before, could He now give me up on account of my past sins? Could He who, as Nārāyaṇa, extends protection to one and all (universal), give up His chosen ones like me? Have I sinned to the extent of making even the oceanic water go dry as it is being pumped out?

Aruḷāta nīr aruḷi, avar āvi tuvarāmuṉ,
Aruḷ āḻip puṭkaṭavīr avar vīti orunāḷ eṉṟu
Aruḷ-aḻi ammāṉaik kaṇṭakkāl, itu colli-
Aruḷ; Āḻi vari vaṇṭē! yāmum eṉ piḷaittōmē? (I–4–6)

Translation

You bee, with lovely hoops! if you meet my gracious Lord,
Pray tell Him, although He didn't relent thus far, He should
His grace on me shed, ere life from me departs,
And just pass some day through this street,
Mounting the gracious bird (Garuḍa); I shall then steal
A glance at Him. Oh! what is my fault
(That He against me His heart should steel)?

Note

In the preceding stanza, the Lord was advised against imperilling His position as Nārāyaṇa. On second thoughts, the Āḻvār now apprehends the frightful possibility of the Lord staying away from him, choosing the lesser of the two evils, the greater one being contamination by the Āḻvār. Here then is a compromise formula—the Lord, being an ocean of grace, will certainly shed His grace on the Āḻvār also, the sooner the better, that is, ere his life ebbs out; even the simple gesture of His passing through the street where the Āḻvār lives, not often, but just one day, will do. The gracious Garuḍa could certainly oblige the Āḻvār and bring the Lord over here on his shoulders. This was precisely the message conveyed by Sītā to Śrī Rāma through Hanumān. Here is also a painful contrast, Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī, separated from her beloved Lord, undergoing all the pangs of mental torture experienced by Śrī Rāma after the abduction of Śītā. The Āḻvār now ruminates and keeps guessing whether his languishing like this without enduring his lot patiently, would be adjudged as his fault. But then, he would also recollect that Śrī Rāma fared no better when apart from Sīta.

Eṉpu iḷai kōppatu pōlap paṉi vāṭai īrkiṉṟatu;
Eṉ piḷaiyē niṉaintaruḷi aruḷāta Tirumālārkku
Eṉ piḷaittāḷ tiruvaṭiyiṉ takaviṉukku eṉṟu oru vāyccol
Eṉ piḷaikkum? iḷaṅ kiḷiyē! yāṉ vaḷartta nī alaiyē. (I–4–7)

Translation

Here am I, tormented by the spine-chilling blast,
Ye young parrot, ain't you the one I reared,

What'll go wrong with you, if you went and enquired
Of 'Tirumāl', who looks solely on my faults
And sheds not His grace on me, what is precisely
My fault that admits not His clemency?

Note

This is the key stanza of this decad. The messages sent in this decad, keep in the forefront the Lord's noble trait of forgiveness (aparādha sahatvaṁ). If the Lord is not prepared to concede even the simple request (as in the preceding stanza) of some day passing through the street where the Āḻvār lives, alienated by his short-comings, the question is now asked, what has happened to His accredited trait of forgiveness, His boundless grace, avidly gorging all our sins. In the inimitable language of 'Iṭu' the Āḻvār queries, "My Lord, have I obstructed the influx of your sweet grace, through over-indulgence in genuflections and circumambulations?"

Nī alaiyē? ciṟu pūvāy! neṭumālārkku eṉ tūtāy
Nōy eṉatu nuval eṉṉa. nuvalātē iruntoḻintāy;
Cāyaloṭu maṇi māmai taḻarntēṉ nāṉ; iṉi uṉatu
Vāy-alakil iṉ-aṭicil vaippārai nāṭāyē. (I–4–8)

Translation

Young Pūvāy, you didn't respond to my appeal
That you should unto Neṭumāl (my Lord) go and reveal
My pangs of separation, but quietly lingered on;
And now that I am sinking, my hue and grace gone,
You shall depart hence and seek those who, thy bill,
With tiny bits of delicious food can fill.

Notes

(i) 'Pūvai' is a nice-looking, tiny bird.

(ii) Here is a thrilling anecdote. With declining health, Peria Tirumalai Nampi, one of the five Preceptors of Śrī Rāmānuja, became too feeble to offer the diurnal worship to the household Deity-Lord Kṛṣṇa, given the pet name of '*The little one dancing for butter*'. And so, one day, drawing aside the drapery that hung before the Deity, he prostrated and recited the last two lines of this particular song (as in the original text), the gist of which has been given above, in the last three lines.

Nāṭāta malar nāṭi, nāḷtōṟum Nāraṇaṉ-taṉ
Vāṭāta malar-aṭikkiḻ vaikkavē vakukkiṉṟu;
Vīṭāṭi vīṟṟiruttal viṉaiaṟṟatu eṉ ceyvatō?
Ūṭāṭu paṉi vāṭāy! uraittu īrāy eṉatu uṭalē. (I–4–9)

Translation

You biting blast, ever on the move, enquire of Nāraṇaṉ, my Lord,
Why (my limbs) for diurnal service at His floral feet ordained,
Are this felicity denied and in melancholy steeped;
If from Him, no favourable reply you obtain,
Better (come and) split my body into twain.

Notes

(i) The chill blast, inflicting severe pain on Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī, like unto the king's executioners torturing the subjects found guilty of high treason, is addressed by her as follows:

"You see me deep down in dejection, due to long separation from my Lord and it is my grievous misfortune that, in such a state, I abstain from the stipulated daily service, such as gathering choice flowers and placing them reverently at the ever-fresh lotus feet of the Lord, etc. You had better go and ask Him how this has come to pass. If, however, He feels disinclined to take service from me, I beg of you, taking your feet in my hands, to finish me off altogether and thus put an end to this insipid and futile existence".

(ii) The wind is the chief sustainer of life and appropriately symbolises the Ācārya (Preceptor).

Uṭal āḻip piṟappu vīṭu uyir mutalā muṟṟumāyk
Kaṭal āḻi-nīr tōṟṟi, ataṉuḷḷē kaṇvaḷarum
Aṭal-āḻi ammāṉaik kaṇṭakkāl, itu colli,
Viṭal, āḻi maṭa neñcē! viṉaiyōm oṉṟām aḷavē. (I–4–10)

Translation

Oh, my fickle mind, 'tis our birthright to serve the Lord,
Go to Him, holding the bright discus and reclining in the deep sea,
The Architect of all created worlds, and let Him see
Our sad plight; leave Him not till unto Him we get restored.

Note

When the details of service unto the Lord were spelt out by the Āḻvār in the preceding stanza, his mind, bent upon such service, was about to slip out of the body. It is held by some that the Āḻvār requested his mind not to get parted till stability with the Lord was attained. Being, however, a decad where the Āḻvār sends errands, it would be more appropriate to say that he sent his mind also on such an errand, briefing it not to leave the Lord till He eventually deigns to get restored to the Āḻvār.

Aḷavu iyaṉṟa ēḻ ulakattavar perumāṉ kaṇṇaṉai
Vaḷa vayal cūḻ vaṇ kurukūrc caṭakōpaṉ vāyntu uraitta
Aḷavu iyaṉṟa antāti āyirattuḷ ip pattiṉ
Vaḷa uraiyāl peṟalākum vāṉ ōṅku peru vaḷamē. (I–4–11)

Translation

Those that just recite these sweet songs ten
Out of the metrically perfect thousand, lovingly composed by Caṭakōpaṉ,
Chief of rich and fertile Kurukūr, in adoration
Of Kaṇṇaṉ, Lord of the denizens of the worlds seven,
Will attain the Supreme bliss of service in Heaven.

Notes

(i) In the preceding decad, expatiating on the Supreme Lord's easy accessibility, the Saint wanted to abide

in the proximate Kṛṣṇa avatāra but failure to achieve it led him to send errands to the Lord in this decad. Having seen the intensity of the love of Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī and her yearning for Divine presence, too deep for words, as revealed in the preceding ten stanzas, the Lord could not stay back any longer, except at the risk of the Āḻvār being lost to this world altogether. The fact that the Lord has been restored to the Saint can be inferred from the very tenor of this stanza, where the Lord is being extolled as the Chief of all the worlds, thus presenting His overlordship and easy-accessibility, side by side.

(ii) Even the mere recital of the text of these stanzas, without so much as delving into their spirit and meaning, will, it is claimed, shoot one up, from the bottom-most depths of worldly existence to the highest state of Service unto the Lord in the High Heavens.

First Centum—Fifth Decad (I-5)
(Vaḷa ēḻ ulakiṉ mutalāya)

Preamble

In each of the preceding four decads, the Āḻvār has highlighted a particular trait of the Lord. These are exaltation (transcendent glory), Worship-worthiness, easy-accessibility (saulabhya) and forgiveness, respectively. In this decad, the Saint brings into focus the Lord's condescension (sauśīlya), mixing freely with the lowliest, the crowning trait of the Lord, heading the list of sixteen traits mentioned by Śrī Vālmīki, in his poser at the very beginning of Rāmāyaṇa*. Śrī Rāma's rapport with Guhā, the hunter, and intimate association with the monkeys, Vibhīṣaṇa etc., illustrate this.

When, in response to the heart-rending, rather, heart-warming appeal of the Āḻvār, in the preceding decad, the Lord presented

* "Konvasmin sāmpratam loke, guṇavān, Kaśca vīryavān etc., etc.

Himself before the Āḻvār, in all His grandeur, betokening the enormity of His grace unto the Āḻvār, one should have expected the latter to just jump in and get himself locked up in the Lord's sweet embrace. But what did he do? The Āḻvār beheld, with bewildering amazement, the Lord, in His full splendour, in dire contrast to his own littleness, a very picture of oppressive contrast indeed, oppressive because he dared not defile and desecrate the Great One, taking undue advantage of His condescending love. And so, he attempted to run away from the Lord, a very strange behaviour for which the only possible explanation is that he just got drifted into such a mental complex at the mere thought of the Lord's transcendent glory. Such alternating extremes of behaviour are, however, noticeable in Saint Yāmuṉa, Kūrattāḻvāṉ and his illustrious son, Śrī Parāśara Bhaṭṭar also. As a matter of fact, the draw-backs in us serve as the foil against which the Lord's 'Sauśīlya' (condescension) shines all the more.

Vaḷa ēḻ ulakiṉ mutalāya vāṉōr-iṟaiyai aruviṉaiyēṉ
kaḷavēḻ veṇṇey toṭu uṇṭa kaḷvā! eṉpaṉ; piṉṉaiyum
taḷavu ēḻ muṟuval-piṉṉaikkuāy val āṉ-āyar talaivaṉāy
Iḷa-ēṟu ēḻum taḻuviya entāy! eṉpaṉ niṉaintu naintē. (I–5–1)

Translation

How dare I, a deep-rooted sinner, meditate
On the Lord of all the worlds and Heaven and narrate
The mystery of His stealing butter and taming bulls,
As a cow-herd boy for the hand of Piṉṉai, the damsel
Of bewitching smile, and (pretend to) thaw down in ecstasy?

Note

The Āḻvār, in his present mood of self-denouncing humility, feels that he has defiled and desecrated the Supreme Lord by word, when he recounted His mysterious deeds and addressed Him as 'My Sire', by thought, when he meditated on Him, and by deed, when he melted down, in ecstasy, as it were, a mockery of devotion.

niṉaintu naintu uḷ karaintu uruki, imaiyōr palarum muṉivarum
puṉainta kaṇṇi nīr cāntam pukaiyōṭu ēnti vaṇaṅkiṉāl,
niṉainta ellāp poruḷkaṭkum vittuāy, mutalil citaiyāmē
maṉam cey ñāṉattu uṉ perumai mācūṇātō? māyōṉē. (I–5–2)

Translation

Oh, wonderful Lord, You are the supreme architect
Of all things conceivable and yet immutable you are!
Will it not from your glory great detract
If (Brahmā and other) Devas, Sages and others
(Your creatures all) meditate on you, thaw down and unto
You offer
Flowers, sandal paste, sacramental water and incense burn?

Notes

(i) In this stanza, the Āḻvār realises that he is unfit even to say that he has defiled the Lord. What is his title, either way, to dabble in God-head? It is something like a person, who, by reason of his birth, is precluded from learning the Vedas, saying that he has not learnt the Vedas, as if he has failed to learn a thing he is entitled to learn. This feeling of the Āḻvār could be inferred from his present observation that even the worship offered through their triple faculties of word, deed and thought, by the exalted Devas, like Brahmā, and Sages of the eminence of Sanaka, pales into insignificance and would only detract from His great glory, as the Supreme Architect of all. It is little better than a team of ants worshipping the majestic lion.

(ii) Once the seed is sown, what comes up is the tree; cotton disappears, when turned into thread which again disappears, when turned into a fabric. But it redounds to the great glory of the Lord, one of His many marvels, that He remains unchanged despite His being the material cause of the entire universe. Well, What glory is there in His being worshipped by His own creatures? It would make sense only if the Lord is

worshipped by persons of comparable stature but alas! there is none falling in this category.

mā yōṉikaḷāy naṭai kaṟṟa vāṉōr palarum muṉivarum
nī yōṉikaḷaip paṭai eṉṟu, niṟai nāṉmukaṉaip paṭaittavaṉ;
cēyōṉ ellā aṟivukkum; ticaikaḷ ellām tiruvaṭiyāl
tāyōṉ; ellā ev uyirkkum tāyoṉ; tāṉ ōr uruvaṉē. (I–5–3)

Translation

He who created the profound Nāṉmukaṉ (Brahmā) and bade him create
The exalted Vāṉōr (Devas), Sages and several others,
He who is beyond comprehension, whose lovely feet
Spanned the worlds, who unto all is like a Mother,
Is our unique Lord (as condescending as He is great).

Note

Finding the Āḻvār in a state of unparalleled humility, shrinking back, the Lord draws his attention to the other mellowing aspect, namely, His loving condescension. Did He not span the entire universe with utter impartiality and set His tender feet over hill and dale, and one and all, without distinction of high and low? Contemplating this episode, the Āḻvār got into a mid-condition in which he would neither approach the Lord nor get away from Him but keep talking of the unique combination in the Lord, of exaltation and condescension, which cannot be found in any one else.

tāṉ ōr uruvē taṉi vittuāy, taṉṉiṉ mūvar mutalāya
vāṉōr palarum muṉivarum maṟṟum maṟṟum muṟṟum āy,
tāṉ ōr perunīr taṉṉuḷḷē tōṟṟi, ataṉuḷ kaṇvaḷarum
vāṉōr perumāṉ; mā māyaṉ vaikuntaṉ em perumāṉē. (I–5–4)

Preamble

Finding the Āḻvār, a little less scared of the Lord's exaltation than a little while ago, some persons asked him what exactly he was intending to do, whether to get near the Lord or get away from Him. This stanza provides the answer to this question, real or supposed. The Āḻvār says:

"Even if I wish to keep aloof, my Lord would not give me up. Look at His condescending love of amazing dimensions. The great Creator of all the worlds and all classes of sentient and non-sentient beings, the Supreme Master of all, including the celestials in the High Heaven, above wants of any kind, reclining on the bosom of the vast expanse of water in Yoga nidrā, is now right here to claim me as His inalienable property'.

Translation

The Supreme Lord beside whom there was none,
Created the first three (Brahmā, Śiva and Indra), this, that and the other,
(Devas, Sages, men, birds, beasts and all) with no *external aid* (i) whatever
And reposed (in Yoga nidra) on the vast expanse of water,
He had raised; the wondrous Lord, Chief of celestials, Vaikuntaṉ, is also my *Master* (ii).

Notes

(i) The Lord is at once the *Material* (Upādāna) cause, *Operative* (nimitta) cause and *Instrumental or efficient* (Sahakāri) cause of Creation.

(ii) This is the key word for this stanza. The Master has come to reclaim His property (the Āḻvār) and He shall not be a party to its slipping through the fingers.

māṉ ēy nōkki maṭavāḷai mārpil koṇṭāy; mātavā!
kūṉē citaiya uṇṭai vil niṟattil teṟittāy; kovintā!
vāṉ ār cōti maṇivaṇṇā! matucūtā! nī aruḷāy uṉ
tēṉē malarun tiruppātam cērumāṟu viṉaiyēṉē (I–5–5)

Preamble

There are two ways of looking at the background of this stanza. The first is: With the recession of his self-abnegating humility, the Āḻvār prays for the felicity of constant attendance on the Lord, in close proximity. The other is: Intent upon stabilising the Āḻvār's longing for Him so that there is no slipping back again, the Lord intensifies the longing by keeping away from him for a while.

Unable to stand this separation, the Āḻvār cries out his heart, invoking the Lord's grace for reunion.

Translation

On your winsome chest, you hold doe-eyed Mother, Oh, Mātavā,
With perfect ease, you remove *the hunch* (i) off a damsel, oh, Kōvintā,
Your sapphire hue radiates the entire heaven, oh, *Matucūtā* (ii)
Your *grace* (iii), this sinner invokes to reach your lotus feet, shedding honey.

Notes

(i) The underlying episode could be either the one stated here, pertaining to Kṛṣṇāvatāra or yet another pertaining to Rāmāvatāra. The former is: As Kṛṣṇa was wending His way through the main road of Mathura along with Balarāma, Tṛvakrā, the hump-backed young woman with handsome features, was passing along with a vessel containing sweet-smelling sandal paste, specially prepared by her for King Kamsa. Kṛṣṇa accosted her and demanded of her some of that excellent preparation. Entranced by Their bewitching looks, she gave the Divine Brothers the thick aromatic paste, with all her heart. Greatly pleased with the service, Śrī Kṛṣṇa deftly transformed her at once into a straight-backed damsel, erect and elegant.

The episode in Rāmāyaṇa relates to Śrī Rāma having hit, out of a boyish prank, the hump on the back of the hunch-backed Mantarā, the maid-servant of Queen Kaikeyī, with unerring aim and caused her great pain. She then bore her suffering silently but wreaked her vengeance on Rāma, at the crucial moment, by poisoning the mind of Kaikeyī. But then, this mischief is attributed to Govinda, that is, Kṛṣṇa in this stanza, which is apparently a misfit. There is, however, the following explanation for this in Nampiḷḷai's 'Īṭu': 'Govinda' could also

mean, 'Protector of the Earth', in which case, the address could fit in with Rāma, as well. Alternately, Kṛṣṇa, with so many mischievous pranks up His sleeves, could easily be made the butt for each and every frolic, whether perpetrated by Him or not, even as the saying goes, "All sins shall be heaped on Amaṇa's head". And now, who is this poor Amaṇa, earning such vicarious notriety? Amaṇa or Śamaṇa is an ascetic of the jain religious order. A complaint went to the King who was a simpleton. The complaint arose from the mud wall of a Brahmin's house giving way and killing a thief who broke into it. When the thief's friends demanded of the Brahmin compensation, both parties appealed to the King for justice. The King asked the Brahmin to pay compensation, as the thief died because of the wet wall. The Brahmin, however, put the blame on the mason who built the Wall. The mason appeared in court and pleaded that it was all the mistake of the waterman who had poured too much water. The waterman blamed the potter who had made the pot big. The potter excused himself by putting the blame on a dancing girl, who passed along and diverted his attention while making the pot. The dancing girl, in turn, blamed the washerman, who failed to bring her clothes in time, and necessitated her visit to his house. The dhoby too trotted out an excuse that the stone on which he washed the clothes was occupied by a Śamaṇa who wouldn't budge from it for quite a long time, and so the return of clothes to the customers was got delayed. And now, the Śamaṇa kept quiet, on account of his vow of silence and the stupid King construed this silence as admission of guilt and ordered the Śamaṇa to be hanged. Our pity rather goes to Kṛṣṇa at whose door every fault is laid, in this fashion.

(ii) 'Matucūta', the sanskrit word being 'Madhusūda' means: Slayer of the demon called Madhu.

(iii) The grace which could condone the sin of the Āḻvār, attempting to run away from the Lord like unto the ruthless rejection of the food served at the dining table.

viṉaiyēṉ viṉai tīr maruntu āṉāy! viṇṇōr talaivā! kēcavā!
maṉai cēr āyar-kula mutalē! mā māyaṉē! mātavā!
ciṉai ēy taḻaiya marāmaraṅkaḷ ēḻum eytāy! cirītarā!
iṉaiyāy! iṉaiya peyariṉāy! eṉṟu naivaṉ aṭiyēṉē. (I–5–6)

Translation

Oh, Kēcava, reigning supreme in the high Heavens
Thou art the antidote for this sinner's (dire) sins.
Oh, Mātavā, of mysterious deeds! Chief of cowherds,
The seven trees with branches many! oh, Cirītarā,
Thine arrow pierced.
Dissolve do I, recounting such other deeds of yours
And the relative names You are pleased to bear.

Note

This is a song sung in the same mood as the immediately preceding song.

aṭiyēṉ ciṟiya ñāṉattaṉ; aṟital ārkkum ariyāṉai,
kaṭi cēr taṇ am tuḻāyk kaṇṇi puṉaintāṉ-taṉṉai, kaṇṇaṉai,
ceṭi ār ākkai aṭiyāraic cērtal tīrkkum tirumālai,
aṭiyēṉ kāṇpāṉ alaṟṟuvaṉ; itaṉiṉ mikku ōr ayarvu uṇṭē? (I–5–7)

Translation

This humble self of meagre intellect pines to meet
Kaṇṇaṉ, sporting tulacī garland, cool and lovely, of fragrance sweet,
Beyond the Comprehension of one and all (however great),
'Tirumāl', who, unto those that seek Him, does cut out
Their bondage dense; is there anything more indiscreet?

Note

The preceding song ended on a despondent note, showing the Āḻvār sinking down, due to the poignance of separation from the Lord. The merciful Lord would not run the risk of

testing him anymore, and was about to oblige him with His presence. Sensing this, however, the Āḻvār was once more weighed down by inferiority complex, egging him on to retreat again. The Āḻvār has all along vociferously condemned those who are content with mere self-enjoyment (Kaivalya) after perennial disembodiment, that is, liberation from the cycle of birth and death, which is far inferior to the bliss of constant service unto the Lord in Heaven. In the present context, however, the Āḻvār is inclined to hold that even this would be wholesome, as compared to a state of embodiment such as his, with its potentiality for such blasphemous conduct as pining for the Lord's presence and mixing with Him, thereby defiling His sacred person. This is indeed the limit for the Āḻvār's humility (naicya).

uṇṭāy ulaku ēḻ muṉṉamē; umiḻntu māyaiyāl pukku,
uṇṭāy veṇṇey ciṟu maṉicar uvalai ākkai nilai eyti;
maṇ-tāṉ cōrntatu uṇṭēlum, maṉicarkku ākum pīr ciṟitum
aṇṭāvaṇṇam, maṇ karaiya, ney-ūṇ maruntō? māyōṉē (I–5–8)

Translation

Wondrous Lord, Once you ate up all the worlds seven
And then spat them out, You then came at your volition
Into this world, assuming the frail form of a human
And ate all the butter (in Gokul) leaving no remnant;
Could it be that you thus sought to dissolve the remnants
Of mud still sticking inside and keep off indigestion,
The fell sickness that befalls humans? (I think it wasn't that).

Note

We are indeed under a deep debt of gratitude to those intellectual stalwarts, our great *Pūrvācāryas*, which we can hardly repay. Look at how they have delved in and unfolded the genesis of this song, from the way it has been worded. The Lord was bent upon having a rapport with the Āḻvār and hit upon a plan which would work well and bring round the Āḻvār, shaking off his inferiority complex. There ensued a dialogue wherein the Lord wanted to elicit from the Āḻvār the purpose of His having come down to Gokul,

as a cowherd and gobbled up all the available butter. When the Āḷvār pleaded ignorance, the Lord Himself gave out that it was just an antidote against the ill-effects of the mud, if any, still sticking inside His stomach, which had once kept all the seven worlds within and thrown them out after some time. The Āḷvār could hardly swallow such a fantastic explanation, firstly, because of the heavy time-lag between the two events and secondly, because there was no reason why He should have appropriated to Himself all the butter produced in that pastoral village, if it was to be a mere medicine. The Āḷvār opined that the Lord ate up avidly all that butter because it was produced by the loving hands of His devotees, a produce which He coveted very much and would not mind taking even stealthily, when not given for the asking. Precisely here, the Āḷvār fell into the Lord's trap. The Lord was quick to point out that the Āḷvār was dear to Him for the same reason and, by trying to keep aloof from Him, he would only join the rank and file of those who tried to keep the butter from Him.

māyōm; tīya alavalaip peru mā vañcap pēy vīyat
tūya kuḷaviyāy viṭap pāl amutā amutu ceytiṭṭa
māyaṉ, vāṉōr taṉit talaivaṉ, malarāḷ maintaṉ, ev uyirkkum
tāyōṉ, tammāṉ, eṉ ammāṉ, ammā mūrttiyaic cārntē. (I–5–9)

Translation

The unique Lord of celestials, *Malarāḷ's* (the lotus-born Lakṣmī's) Consort,
A veritable Mother (unto all) who His own Sovereign is,
As well as mine, the typical (but wondrous) babe that killed outright
The highly treacherous and loquacious demoness
Whose poisonous milk He sucked as if it were nectar (amṛt)
Close unto the exalted one am I; may we never again be apart.

Note

Here is the continuation of the dialogue referred to in the preceding stanza. The Āḷvār observed that unlike the palatable butter, mixing with him, a terrible sinner, will be bitter

like poison. But the Lord had a ready reply for this also. He pointed out that even the milk of the poisonous breast of Pūtaṉā, the evil-minded imposter of a mother, was sucked by Him, with great relish, as if it were nectar. So saying, He pounced upon the Āḷvār and got hold of him. The Āḷvār also responded by avowing that he will never again part from Him. The line in this song narrating that the Lord, typical of a tender babe, relished the poisonous milk tendered by Pūtaṉā like nectar, follows the text of 'Harivaṁśaṁ'.*

cārnta iru val-viṉaikaḷum carittu, māyap paṟṟu aṟuttu,
tirntu, taṉpāl maṉam vaikkat tirutti, vīṭu tiruttuvāṉ:
ārnta ñāṉac cuṭar āki, akalam kīḻ mēl aḷavu iṟantu,
nērnta uruvāy, aruvākum ivaṟṟiṉ uyirām neṭumālē. (I–5–10)

Translation

Of resplendent knowledge, full and flooding,
All things, with or without form, He is pervading
Up and down and all around; Neṭumāl (of love supreme)
Rid me of my age-long sins of commission and omission and in Him
Rooted my mind firmly, freed from ignorance and attachments
And is now intent upon giving heaven a face-lift (to put me in).

Note

Immensely pleased with the assurance given by the Āḷvār in the previous song not to get parted from Him any more, the Lord now contemplates putting the Āḷvār in Heaven, so as to eliminate the possible risk of further separation from Him. And for this purpose, the Lord, in His unbounded love for the Āḷvār, wants to renovate even that Eternal Land, ever fresh and pure, which hardly needs touching up or a face-lift, as such! Indeed, The Āḷvār feels enthralled by the Lord's extraordinary love for him (as the word 'Neṭumāl' in the text connotes).

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* 'Sthanyaṁ tat viṣa sammiśraṁ rasyamāsith jagad Guro '.

mālē! māyap perumāṉē! mā māyavaṉē! eṉṟu eṉṟu,
mālē ēṟi māl aruḷāl maṉṉu kurukūrc caṭakōpaṉ
pāl ēy tamiḻar icaikārar pattar paravum āyirattiṉ
pālē paṭṭa ivai pattum vallārkku illai parivatē. (I–5–11)

Translation

Those conversant with these songs ten,
Out of the thousand sung by Kurukūr Caṭakōpaṉ,
Firm recipient of the Lord's grace, in ecstatic adoration
Of His wondrous deeds and glorious traits, evoking the admiration
Alike of the 'Sweet-as-milk' Tamil-Scholars, devotees and musicians,
Shall for ever be free from affliction.

Notes

(i) The accent here is on the redemptive grace of the Lord, Who, by His condescending love, reclaimed the Āḻvār, thwarting his attempt to run away from Him in a frightfully unsettled state of mind.

(ii) These songs are of matchless grandeur and inestimable value for those who want to revel in singing sweet songs of a high order. And again, for those who want to delve into their meanings and eke out their time usefully, these songs afford unlimited scope.

First Centum—Sixth Decad (I-6)
(Parivatu il īcaṉai)

Preamble

Following the pattern, hitherto noticed, of bringing to the fore a particular auspicious trait of the Lord in each decad (Tiruvāymoḻi), 'Swārādatva' (i.e.) easy worshippability of the Lord is emphasised in this decad. Unlike the minor deities whom it is very hard to propitiate, what with the sacrifice of goats and hens and other such harsh demands on their votaries, the Lord is pleased with whatever is offered to Him lovingly, with pious will. Being

above wants of any kind, it is unthinkable that He would want from us any offering at all. God sets greater value upon the devotion of the heart than the material value of outward offerings. He hates hypocrisy and estimates the sincerity of the soul. In His song Celestial, He has affirmed: 'Whoever offers Me in faith and love, a leaf (as Draupati did), a flower (as Gajendra did), a fruit (as Sabhari did), water poured forth (as Ambarīṣā did), that offering I accept, lovingly made with pious will. Things, easy of procurement for all, including the poorest of the poor, offered, not for expiation of sins or securing other ends but considering giving to Me as an end in itself and out of sheer inability to exist without making a love-gift to Me are indeed acceptable. In the absence of the devotee's inability to offer anything for eating, I consume even the leaves and flowers offered. Vidura gave me plantain skins and Kuchela gave me but poor beaten rice and yet, I devoured them all with great avidity, like a famished fellow".

The outward offerings may be trifles but, in God's eye, they carry much weight, when offered in humility and devotion. Once some Princes had a desire to offer campaka flower to Lord Jagannatha at Pūri, knowing that it is His favourite flower. On going to the flower market, they found that all but a single flower had already been sold out. Each one of the Princes was keen on buying it and offered competitive price. One of them staked his entire fortune, bought the flower and offered it to the Lord. That night, God appeared in the Prince's dream and said, "The debt of thy flower is very heavy. I cannot bear its weight", thus showing His gracious acceptance of the sincerely made offering. As already stated, the Lord is above wants of any kind, and yet He greedily grabs at the selfless service rendered unto Him by the devotees disinterestedly, as an end in itself. In this decad, the Āḻvār enjoys and extols this great trait of the Lord.

parivatu il īcaṉaip pāṭi virivatu mēval uṟuvīr!
pirivakai iṉṟi nal nīr tūy, purivatuvum pukai pūvē. (I–6–1)

Translation

Ye zealous seekers of salvation, rise to your full stature,
Singing the praise of our griefless God;

Serve Him with water pure, seeking no personal good,
Burn incense before Him and flowers do offer.

Notes

(i) This song is addressed to the seekers of salvation who should naturally rise to their full stature through complete expansion, rather, realisation of their true or essential nature.

(ii) Being the repository of innumerable auspicious traits, a veritable fountain of inexhaustible bliss, the Lord is naturally free from grief of any kind, on His own. But then, He grieves over the woes of His countless subjects and this trait of commisseration with the miseries of others, with a complete sense of identity and deep compassion for them, is indeed praiseworthy. Actually, this heads the list of many good qualities noticed in Śrī Rāma by the Citizens of Ayodhyā and enumerated by them in King Daśaratha's court. Even so, the question is asked, why the Almighty Lord who can jolly well quell all our miseries in no time, should grieve for us, as we weaklings do, merely expressing our grief over the miseries of others, being incapable of giving them any kind of relief. This erroneous impression can be set at naught if we take into account our own every day experience, the parents feeling distressed over the sufferings of the young ones, notwithstanding the active steps taken by the former promptly to administer the requisite relief to the latter. Draupati, in dire distress, was no doubt prevented from getting disrobed due to the plentiful supply of clothes arranged for by Lord Kṛṣṇa, and yet, He cried out His heart, lamenting that He remained a debtor unto Draupati, having failed to be present at the scene of the dastardly occurence and worse still, having failed to avert the incident altogether. When Gajendra, the elephant raised a piteous alarm for succour at the end of a titanic struggle with its mighty opponent, the crocodile, the Lord went post-haste to the scene of distress and retrieved the elephant. All the same, the Lord very much repented that He had not rushed to Gajendrā's aid much earlier.

(iii) Serving the Lord who is but our Father, should by-no-means be difficult, seeing that the son need have no qualms nor be fastidious and fretsome, in regard to the food served to his own father, by virtue of the natural bonds of Kinship and mutual concern. Discoursing on this song, Śrī Parāśara Bhaṭṭar pointed out that the text of the song bears out that no flower is taboo, and in the name of burning incense, as part of worship, even waste wooden chips from the carpenter's chisel could be burnt and smoke raised therefrom. There is no specification, as such, regarding the flower to be offered and the incense to be burnt. When his stalwart disciple, Nañcīyar, observed that there is a śāstraic injunction against the use of the flower, known in Samskṛit as 'Kar ḍakārika', for the Lord's worship, Bhaṭṭārya elucidated that the injunction in question is solely weighted in favour of the worshipper, to eliminate the risk involved in plucking this flower from its thorny plant.

matuvār taṇ am tuḻāyāṉ mutu vēta mutalavaṉukku,
etu ētu eṉ paṇi eṉṉātu, atuvē āḷ-ceyyum īṭē. (I–6–2)

Translation

"What service is there, and that too, for poor me,
Appropriate to the Primate, the colossal Lord, by Vedas revealed,
Wearer of nice, cool, 'tulacī' garland, shedding honey?"
If one doesn't think so (and shrink), by him is the Lord well served indeed.

Notes

(i) Having ruled out, in the preceding song, the restriction regarding the thing to be offered to the Lord, the Āḻvār now stresses the fact that there is also no restriction regarding the persons eligible to serve Him. If one does not shrink back from the Lord's service, in

bewildering amazement that there is hardly any service that can be rendered, appropriate to the colossal stature of the Lord and, that too, by one with serious limitations, it is as good as having served the Lord. In other words, there is hardly any scope for such a feeling of aloofness.

(ii) Even a faded garland coming in contact with the Lord's person will become fresh again and shed copious quantities of honey. That being so, the devotee need not have any qualms in regard to the offerings to be made.

(iii) As Bādarāyaṇa (*Sage Vyāsa*) has pointed out in his 'Brahma Sūtra,' *the Lord can be known only through the authority of the Vedas, as distinguished from Ocular and inferential knowledge. The Supreme Lord is revealed by the Vedas, as the first and foremost.

iṭum eṭuppum il Īcaṉ māṭu viṭātu eṉ maṉaṉē;
pāṭum eṉ nā avaṉ pāṭal; āṭum eṉ aṅkam aṉaṅkē. (I–6–3)

Translation

My mind can never be away from Īcaṉ (Lord Supreme),
Who makes no distinction 'tween high and low;
My tongue His glory sings at all times
While my body danceth in ecstatic glow.

Notes

(i) The Lord does not extend special favours by reason of one's high parentage, calibre and conduct, nor does He give up those of low descent, meagre intellect and poor conduct. He is absolutely impartial. †Prahlāda and Vibhīṣaṇa of Asura and Rākṣasa clan, respectively, were among His beneficiaries. If the other Asuras and Rākṣasas came to grief the fault was not with

* 'Śāstra Yōnitvāt'.
† "Devānām Dānavānāñca Sāmānyam adhidhaivatam".

the Lord. It is like a few persons falling, now and then, into the tank dug up for the common good of all and killing themselves.

(ii) It is noteworthy that the Āḻvār stands rivetted to the Lord by word, deed and thought.

aṉaṅku eṉa āṭum eṉ aṅkam vaṇaṅki vaḻipaṭum; Īcaṉ
piṇaṅki amarar pitaṟṟum kuṇaṅkeḻu koḷkaiyiṉāṉē. (I–6–4)

Translation

Īcaṉ (the Lord) I venerate, dancing in gay abandon,
Is the natural repository of many an auspicious trait,
Leaving the celestials in the high Heaven,
Entranced and engaged in endless debate.

Note

As the Lord said in Bhagavad-Gītā, His lover's thoughts are rivetted to Him, their lives are nestled in Him and their conversation is solely about Him, full of mutual enlightenment and entertainment. The debate, referred to, in this Song, could arise from the adoration of the Lord by the Celestials, from different angles, one group talking about the Lord's transcendent glory and the other about His easy accessibility and loving condescension. The Āḻvār marvels at that even his faculties vie with the experience of that exalted band in heaven.

koḷkai koḷāmai ilātāṉ eḻkal irākam ilātāṉ:
viḷkai viḷḷāmai virumpi uḷ kalantārkku ōr amutē. (I–6–5)

Translation

Not given to likes and dislikes, acceptance or rejection,
Of (service from) devotees, looking to their attainments alone,
A nectar of incomparable excellence, the Lord is
Unto those that with Him do mingle, giving up all else.

Note

In the preceding song, the Āḻvār presented to us the Lord as One, who would welcome to His benevolent fold every one,

without distinction of high and low, seeking His protection. And now, we are told that the Lord is free from likes and dislikes and is, therefore, not prone to extend preferential treatment to some and be indifferent to others on the basis of their individual attainments, while enlisting them in His service. All that He looks for is whether these devotees are steadfast in their devotion, true to their essential nature of being the objects of His sole enjoyment (ananya bhōgyatva) or merely seek from Him the fulfilment of their own personal desires, the odds and ends. While the latter class seeking the lesser fruits get what they want and also get parted from the Lord in the bargain, to the former class who stand rivetted to, and nestled, in Him, He is a veritable nectar of incomparable excellence, ever fresh and insatiable.

amutam amararkaṭku īnta nimir cutar-āḻi neṭumāl
amutilum āṟṟa iṉiyaṉ: nimir tirai nīḷ kaṭalāṉē. (I–6–6)

Translation

Of limitless glory, Neṭumāl, holding the discus
Of mounting radiance and reclining on the spacious
Milk-Ocean of surging waves, is more appetising indeed
Than the ambrosia which unto Amarars (Devas) He once delivered.

Note

The Āḻvār has nothing but contemptuous pity for the Devas who sought the 'amṛt' obtained by churning the Milk-Ocean, instead of the far more delicious Lord holding the effulgent discus, enchanting beyond words. Although the Āḻvār's contempt for the Devas is not explicit from the text of the song, the episode of delivering the "amṛt" to the Devas, referred to, in the first line of the song, pales into insignificance before the Lord's own nectarean presence and exquisite charm enjoyed by the Āḻvār in the second line of the song and thus indirectly exhibits the Devas at a disadvantage. The Āḻvār has given yet another name to the Lord, namely, '*One who is more appetising than ambrosia*'. Nampi Tiruvaḻutirāṭu Tācar remarked that the Devas

were no better than the bovine species, not looking up and beholding the exquisite charm of the Lord churning and moving around with His thousand sinewy shoulders and the beautiful garlands adorning them. Instead, they were gazing at the ocean, with their heads bent down, content with a mere extract from the salt-water, what a pity !

nīḷ kaṭal cūḻ ilaṅkaik kōṉ tōḷkaḷ talai tuṇiceytāṉ
tāḷkaḷ talaiyil vaṇaṅki, nāḷkaḷ talaikkaḻimiṉṉē. (I–6–7)

Translation

If you bow unto Him Who Smote
The heads and shoulders of the King
Of Laṅkā, with the long sea as its moat,
The ocean of time, it helps crossing.

kaḻimiṉ toṇṭirkaḷ! kaḻittut toḻumiṉ avaṉai; toḻutāl,
vaḻi niṉṟa valviṉai māḷvittu aḻiviṉṟi ākkam tarumē. (I–6–8)

Translation

Ye, servants of God, sever your contacts
With all things ungodly and serve the Lord;
Your age-long, sturdy sins, the Lord will cut out
And grant you eternal bliss and beatitude.

taruma arum payaṉ āya tirumakaḷār taṉik kēḷvaṉ
perumai uṭaiya pirāṉār irumai viṉai kaṭivārē. (I–6–9)

Translation

The bliss very dear, Tirumakaḷ's unique Spouse confers,
The Benefactor great (in her glorious company) full of grace,
The fruits of actions, good and bad, He severs,
(The impediments to the free flow of His grace).

Notes

(i) Tirumakaḷ, (Goddess Mahālakṣmī) is the very embodiment of grace.* Her perpetual presence by the side of the

* 'Lakṣmyā saha Hṛṣīkeśo Devyā Kāruṇya rūpayā' (Śrī Pāñcarātra.)

Lord is intended to prepare the ground for the supplication by the individual souls, at all times, without any restriction whatsoever. Although the Lord is the ultimate giver and deliverer, yet He invariably acts only when Mahālakṣmī plays the recommendatory role, mediating and pleading for erring souls.

(ii) For the attainment of final bliss, both merit (Puṇya) and demerit (Pāpa or Sins) are impediments. As Śrī Vedānta Deśika has put it, in his 'Varadarāja Pancāsat', the former is a golden fetter while the latter is an iron fetter. A golden fetter is still a fetter and thus both 'Puṇya' and 'Pāpa' impede one's advancement to the final goal. Hence the need to cut out both, an act of grace galore, on the part of Lakṣmī-Kānta (the gracious Consort of Goddess Mahālakṣmī).

kaṭivār tiya viṉaikaḷ noṭiyārum aḷavaikkaṉ;
koṭiyā aṭu puḷ uyartta vaṭivu ār mātavanārē. (I–6–10)

Translation

Mātavaṉ, of exquisite Form,
On whose banner is Garuḍa the bird,
Destroyer of enemies, will, in no time,
Root out the fell sins (we dread).

Note

What is emphasised here is the utmost speed with which Mādhava, the Lord, in conjunction with the Divine Mother, roots out all the evils in us. And what more? The Lord extends to the Soul, reclaimed just then, the same affinity as He holds for the pre-eminent Garuḍa, the 'Ever-free angel-Nitya Sūri'. The reclamation is put through in a trice through the instrumentality of Śrī Mahālakṣmī, who urges: "My Lord, here is the supplicant at your door-step, tossed between birth on one side, and death on the other, and smitten, in between, by maladies, both mental and physical; please bestow your grace and redeem him, turning a blind eye to all his sins; else, you may have to write off the entire '*Līla Vibhūti*' (Sportive universe)".

mātavaṉpāl caṭakōpaṉ tītu avam iṉṟi uraitta
ētam il āyirattu ip pattu ōta vallār piṟavārē. (I–6–11)

Translation

Those initiated in these songs ten,
Out of the thousand flawless songs of Caṭakōpaṉ,
Adoring Mātavaṉ as One above the twin faults
(Of aloofness and abandonment), will from rebirth be freed for ever.

Note

It might be apprehended that the Lord is open to the twin faults of (1) Keeping Himself aloof from us with an air of indifference because of His exaltation, and (2) abandoning us, looking to our truck-loads of vices. The Āḻvār avers, in this decad, that the Lord is above these faults, thereby emphasising His easy worshippability.

First Centum—Seventh Decad (I-7)
Piṟavittuyar aṟa

Preamble

Easy worshippability apart, the Lord should also be adorable. We see around quite a few persons whom it is easy to please but we don't like to court as there is nothing attractive or prepossessing in them. This decad shows that the Lord is highly adorable because of His extraordinary sweetness. As Nampiḷḷai would have it, the Lord is adorable to such an extent that He grows envious of His devotees and wants to adore them, in turn, having Himself tasted the sweetness of adoration. In śloka 'Manujatva tiroitena.........' of Pādukā Sahaśram, Śrī Vedānta Deśika observes that, unlike the previous Avatāras when the Lord came all alone, He assumed four forms when He came down as Śrī Rāma and the three younger brothers. The purpose behind this was to adore His own pair of sandals which have a high reputation of their own. This He did in His other form as Bharata. Had Rāma come alone, He couldn't have achieved this purpose.

piṟavittuyar aṟa ñāṉattuḷ niṉṟu,
tuṟavic cuṭar-viḷakkam talaippeyvār
aṟavaṉai āḻippaṭai antaṇaṉai
maṟaviyai iṉṟi maṉattu vaippārē (I–7–1)

Translation

(Oh, what a pity!) the Lord, gracious and immaculate,
Sporting the effulgent discus, is tenaciously sought
By those votaries wanting no more than to liberate
Themselves from the miseries of birth and death and get lost
In a state of 'Self-enjoyment' (of the Soul in its free state).

Note

Oh, what a pity! After all the rigours of their disciplines, the '*Kevalas*' rest contented with mere liberation from the cycle of birth and death, followed by 'ātmāvalokana' (i.e.) enjoyment of their own selves in the disembodied state. The tragedy of it is heightened by the fact that they invoked the Lord's grace for attaining this state but failed to be enthralled by His exquisite charm. The Āḻvār detests these people for this tragic failure resulting in their foregoing, for ever, the superior bliss of service unto the Lord. No doubt, in I-5-7, the Āḻvār would appear to have had a word of praise for the '*Kevalas*' but that was in a different context. It may be recalled that the Āḻvār, then stung by a gnawing apprehension of his abject lowliness, felt that possession of a body was fraught with the serious risk of his contaminating and defiling the Lord by mixing with Him and that a disembodied state of existence, as in the case of the 'Kevalas', would, therefore, be quite welcome, being the lesser of the two evils.

vaippu ām, maruntu ām, aṭiyarai valviṉait
tuppu ām pulaṉ aintum tuñcakkoṭāṉ avaṉ;
eppāl evarkkum nalattāl uyarntu uyarntu
appālavaṉ eṅkaḷ āyar-koḻuntē. (I–7–2)

Translation

The Lord is, unto His devotees, the treasure fine
And the unfailing drug; unto the senses five
He shan't make them succumb; of towering bliss,
He's above one and all, in all places,
Beyond speech and thought and yet He's (our Gopāla), the shepherd chief!

Note

Having decried and detested, in the preceding stanza, the '*Kevalas*' seeking from the gracious Lord the inferior stature of *Kaivalya*, the Āḻvār now depicts the Lord in relation to those who seek Him as the goal, to the exclusion of everything else. Towering above all, beyond speech and comprehension, He still condescended to come down here as Gopālakṛṣṇa, of amazing simplicity.

āyar-koḻuntāy, avarāl puṭaiyuṇṇum
māyap pirāṉai, eṉ māṇikkac cōtiyai,
tūya amutaip parukip paruki, eṉ
māyap piravi mayarvu aṟuttēṉē. (I–7–3)

Translation

I drank and drank, without intermission, the nectar pure,
The dazzling gem, the mystic Lord of wondrous deeds,
(Gopāla) the shepherd chief, bound and beaten by cowherds
(For theft of butter) and got my nescience, matter-born, severed.

Notes

(i) Speaking about Gopālakṛṣṇa, in the last song, the Āḻvār had before him the entire panorama of His mysterious deeds and by merely meditating on them, he got all his accumulated nescience, born of age-long material contacts, eradicated in *toto*, root and branch.

(ii) In the by-gone days, the Devas got nectar subject to various conditions. Even so, it is by no means comparable to the Āḻvār's uninhibited and unrestricted Divine experience, drinking deep of that pure nectar which cleansed him thoroughly and rooted out his age-long sins sheathed in ignorance.

mayarvu aṟa eṉ maṉattē maṉṉiṉāṉ-taṉṉai,
uyarviṉaiyē tarum oṇ cuṭark kaṟṟaiyai,
ayarvu il amararkaḷ ātik koḷuntai, eṉ
icaiviṉai, eṉ colli yāṉ viṭuvēṉō (I–7–4)

Translation

Oh! what pretext can I find, from Him to part,
The first Lord of Celestials ever alert,
A beautiful bundle of brilliance, heaping on me continually,
Torrents of knowledge and wisdom, who brought me
Round and to root out my ignorance lodged in me firmly?

Notes

(i) In the preceding song, the Āḷvār acknowledged the Lord's benevolence in rooting out all his ignorance. This is exactly what he had prayed for in his supplication to the Lord in the very first song of his first work (Tiruviruttam). Having achieved his purpose, can the Āḷvār now afford to forget the Lord? No, having removed all the vestiges of ignorance in the Āḷvār, the Lord continually resides in his mind, shutting out effectively the further growth of nescience in him. And what more? He is continually heaping upon the Āḷvār torrents of wisdom (Jñāna) and love (Bhakti). A beautiful bundle of brilliance, He is also the first Lord of the 'Nitya Sūrīs' (Eternal Heroes). How can the Āḷvār get himself divested of One, so great and so charming, ever inducing in him a passionate desire to be very close to Him? Thus, nothing is wanting on the Lord's side to admit of a divorce from Him. If at all one wishes to throw odium on such a loving Lord, it can only be a sin-contrived dodge, like the one in the following anecdote:

(ii) A peasant boy who visited his father-in-law, was asked by the latter to help him to work a water-lift. The two of them started the work early in the morning and the boy who was high up on the lift, naturally felt tired when it was past mid-day. The father-in-law did not, however, have the courtesy to give the young son-in-law the much-needed relief. There upon, the latter, in sheer exasperation, spat on the back of the elder, just to provoke him. "How cool!" exclaimed the elder and went on with the work. The boy sharply jumped down, saying, "Better get hold of one who will spit on you hot!"

viṭuvēṉō-eṉ viḷakkai, eṉ āviyai,
naṭuvē vantu uyyak koḷkiṉṟa nātaṉai,
toḷuvē ceytu iḷa āycciyar kaṇṇiṉuḷ
viṭavē ceytu viḷikkum pirāṉaiyē. (I–7–5)

Translation

The amorous Lord who, by His sweet looks,
Enticed away the young damsels (of Gokula)
Is my Soul, the beacon light, Who unto me reveals
All things; how can I from Him separation brook,
My Saviour grand who did on me alight, all on a sudden?

Note

The damsels of Gokula would even spurn Heaven, but not give up the inseparable company of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. The Lord having enthralled the Āḷvār likewise, there is no question of his giving Him up.

pirāṉ, peru nilam kīṇṭavaṉ, piṉṉum
virāy malart tuḷāy vēynta muṭiyaṉ,
marāmaram eyta māyavaṉ eṉṉuḷ
irāṉ eṉil, piṉṉai yāṉ oṭṭuvēṉō (I–7–6)

Translation

How can I at all survive, if the Benefactor great
Who once retrieved the Earth from the ocean,
On whose crown is the tulacī garland of aroma sweet,
The wonder-Lord whose arrow sped thro' the trees seven,
Should desert me and stay not in my heart?

Note

This is the Āḷvār's reply to a question supposed to have been put to him as to what he would do, in case the Lord forsook

him once again. The Āḷvār rules out such a contingency, seeing that the Lord is a self-less Benefactor like Sandal paste, flower, southerly breeze and the Moon, catering to the happiness of others, seeking nothing in return. Surely, the Āḷvār would not be a willing party to the separation and he just can't survive in such an eventuality. As a matter of fact, the Āḷvār cannot bring himself to believe that the Lord would at all leave him and go without his permission. Did He not, as Śrī Rāma, go even to the extent of clearing up the misgivings in the mind of Sugrīva about His ability to vanquish Vāli and infusing the requisite confidence? Could such a one desert the Āḷvār, who has firm faith in Him?

yāṉ oṭṭi eṉṉuḷ iruttuvaṉ eṉṟilaṉ;
tāṉ oṭṭi vantu, eṉ taṉi neñcai vañcittu,
ūṉ oṭṭi niṉṟu, eṉ uyiril kalantu, iyal-
vāṉ oṭṭumō-iṉi eṉṉai nekiḻkkavē? (I–7–7)

Translation

In my mind I lodged Him not, on my own;
Pledged to get in, the Lord did, on His own,
Enter my mind imperious, unsought,
Stuck avidly to my body and soul and wrought
A silent change in me, drawing me unto Him, so well.
To part from me hence, will such a One agree at all?

Notes

(i) The Lord entered the Āḷvār's mind, pledged, as it were, to do so. This would show that the Āḷvār took no initiative in the matter. On the other hand, self-reliant and imperious that he was, he stood aloof, very much away from Him. But once a determined Lord took possession of the Āḷvār, the latter came under His magic spell, just like the miser who yielded to the resolute beggar, in the anecdote cited below.

(ii) There was a Brāhman who was an abject miser; another was on his way to this man's house to get a breakfast. People on the way told the latter that the man he was going to, was the most sordid wretch who would not

give food to any one. Undaunted, the beggar sought out the miser and begged for food, showing his great need. The miser was adamant in refusing food but the beggar would not leave him. The miser had to yield at last and when he asked the beggar to produce his eating plate, the latter opened his garment and showed it. The miser grumbled and exclaimed "He who intends cutting another's throat, certainly brings the sword with him". So saying, he couldn't help handing over to the persevering, rather provoking beggar, a little bit of rice and sauce to get rid of him.

eṉṉai nekiḻkkilum, eṉṉuṭai naṉ-neñcam
taṉṉai akalvikkat tāṉum killāṉ iṉi:
piṉṉai neṭum paṉait tōḷ makiḻ piṭu uṭai
muṉṉai amarar muḻumutal tāṉē. (I–7–8)

Translation

With His sinewy shoulders in Piṉṉai nestled,
The joyous Lord Who unto the hoary Celestials
Is all in all, cannot from Him separate, with all His might,
My chastened mind, in Him entwined so well, albeit
He, His grip on me, loosens and makes me stay apart.

Note

The Āḷvār avers that history will not repeat itself. Even if the Almighty Lord, in His unbridled independence, tried His utmost to keep the Āḷvār away, He wouldn't succeed in putting aside his chastened mind, inseparably steeped in Him. This robust confidence has indeed the solid backing of Piṉṉai (Goddess Nappinna) the unfailing Intercessor through whose good offices the Āḷvār courted the Lord.

amarar muḻumutal ākiya ātiyai,
amararkku amutu īnta āyar-koḻuntai,
amara aḻumpat tuḻāvi, eṉ āvi
amarat taḻuviṟṟu; iṉi akalummō? (I–7–9)

Translation

The Primate Who unto Celestials is the fountain source
Of all felicities, Who unto *Amarar* (Devas) delivered ambrosia,
The Chief of the cowherds got into my soul, in tight embrace,
With pleasure immense; Could He from me be apart anymore?

Note

Unto the Devas, who wanted 'Amṛt' (ambrosia), the mere extract from the ocean and not the Lord Himself, He gave the Amṛt; He, however, gave Himself to the Cowherds in whose midst He was born, because they wanted Him, the real 'Amṛt' and not that artificial stuff. The Āḷvār's soul got steeped in Him to such an extent and in such a manner that the one couldn't be told from the other and hence there was no question of separation, as if they were two different entities.

akalil akalum; aṇukil aṇukum;
pukalum ariyaṉ, poru allaṉ emmāṉ:
nikar il avaṉ pukaḻ pāṭi iḷaippu ilam
pakalum iravum paṭintu kuṭaintē. (I–7–10)

Translation

Apart from them who from Him keep apart,
Close to them who unto Him get close,
Beyond approach (to the ungodly) but easy of access
(To devotees); entranced do I sing His glory peerless,
Day and night and never feel satiate.

Note

In the immense struggle between the Lord on the one side and the worldings on the other, the latter, swayed by the stronger pull of earthly pleasures, stray away from Him. Indeed, the Lord grieves over this state of affairs. Unto those who seek Him exclusively, He responds so well that it is said, when man walks towards God, He runs towards him. When man ascends to the foot-stool of God, He enters the soul of man.

Inexhaustible are His auspicious qualities and therefore it is that we can never reach the end and feel satiated in singing His praise.

kuṭaintu vaṇṭu uṇṇum tuḷāy muṭiyāṉai
aṭainta teṉ kurukūrc caṭakōpaṉ
miṭainta col-toṭai āyirattu ip pattu
uṭaintu nōykaḷai ōṭuvikkumē. (I–7–11)

Translation

These songs ten, out of the well-knit thousand,
Composed by Caṭakōpaṉ of Teṉkurukūr, in worship bound
To the Lord, wearing on His crown tulacī garland,
Whose honey the swarming bees partake, will all our ill disband.

First Centum—Eighth Decad (I-8)
Ōṭum puḷ ēṟi

Preamable

In this decad, the Āḷvār bringsto the fore the Lord's quality of 'Uprightness' (*ārjava* or *rujuḥ*), His transparence in word, deed and thought, free from sophistry, duplicity, mental reservation, mischievous distortion etc. The Lord would not mean one thing, say another and do a third thing. When Sūrpaṇakhā saw Śrī Rāma at Pañcavaṭi and interrogated Him about His personal history, there would have been nothing wrong if He had tactfully withheld the truth from the demoness. But it was not in His grain to do so and hence He gave out the actual fact with remarkable sincerity.

Tirukkurukaippirāṉ Piḷḷāṉ, the earliest glossator on 'Tiruvāymoḷi,' holds that this decad highlights the Lord's wealth (*Aiśvarya*). The other commentators, Periyavāccāṉ Piḷḷai and Vaṭakku Tiruvīti Piḷḷai, however, prefer to bring into focus the Lord's '*ārjava*' in this decad, as stated at the outset.

ōṭum puḷ ēṟi, cūṭum taṇ-tuḷāy,
nīṭu niṉṟavai āṭum: ammāṉē. (I–8–1)

Translation

The Lord (in heaven) does avidly mingle
With the exalted celestials, one and all;
Takes He a lightning ride on a bird (Garuḍa)
And sports the cool tulacī garland delectable.

Note

This refers to the state of affairs in the yonder heaven. The Lord is said to regale one and all over there, by granting them suitable opportunities for rendering Him the appropriate service.

ammāṉāyp piṉṉum em māṇpum āṉāṉ:
vem mā vāy kīṇṭa cem mā kaṇṇaṉē. (I–8–2)

Translation

Our Sire (the Lord) with large, red eyes
Came down as Kaṇṇaṉ (and mingled with us)
Tore He the mouth of the demon fierce,
Who (to Kill Him) came as a horse,
Many indeed are His incarnations glorious

Note

Although specific mention has been made here of the Lord's incarnation as Kṛṣṇa, there is also a broad reference to all His Avatāras as well, wherein He mixes with the worldlings with remarkable transparence, even as He does with the denizens in heaven.

kaṇ āvāṉ eṉṟum maṇṇōr viṇṇōrkku:
taṇ ār vēṅkaṭa viṇṇōr veṟpaṉē. (I–8–3)

Translation

The Lord who is like unto a pair of eyes
For those on Earth and Heaven,

Stays in Vēṅkaṭam, cool and nice,
The Celestials' favourite haven.

Note

Like unto the mother of twins lying in between her two kids, the Lord stays in Tiruvēṅkaṭam (in Andhra Pradeś), the meeting ground of the Earthlings and the Celestials. The Āḻvār even goes to the extent of calling this glorious hilly retreat as the home of the Celestials, on the ground that the Celestials visiting it far exceed the number of the earthly visitors. Actually, it is the amazing simplicity of the Supreme Lord, making Himself easily accessible even to the monkeys and hunters around this sacred spot, that drags the celestials on to this centre. It is reverently held by our elders that the fauna and flora on the sacred Hills are but Celestials transplanted there.

veṟpai oṉṟu eṭuttu, oṟkam iṉṟiyē,
niṟkum ammāṉ cīr kaṟpaṉ vaikalē. (I–8–4)

Translation

Let me every day utter (and adore)
The Lord's grace galore;
Mount (Govardhana) He did lift
And stood with ease (holding it aloft).

Notes

(i) Periyāḻvār extols the effortless holding by Śrī Kṛṣṇa of Govardhana Mountain, days on end, without the slightest strain on His fingers and nails (Periyāḻvār Tirumoḻi III-5-10).

(ii) Śrī Kūrattāḻvāṉ also exclaims, in sloka 45 of *Varadarāja Stavaṁ* that the Lord held Mount Govardhana continually for seven days and yet, His fingers were as fresh as ever.

(iii) The irate Indra, out to destroy the pastoral life of Gokul, could have well been destroyed by Śrī Kṛṣṇa but He relented, hoping that Indra would soon recover

from this temporary aberration caused by the deprivation of the offerings. At the same time, He shielded the entire pastoral community by holding the mountain aloft like an umbrella for seven long days, till Indra's fury abated. The Āḻvār, on his part, would never feel tired of recounting this episode, rather he subsists on it.

vaikalum veṇṇey kaikalantu uṇṭāṉ
poy kalavātu eṉ mey kalantāṉē. (I–8–5)

Translation

The Lord stretched His hands as far as He could,
(Snatched) the butter and ate (as much as He liked);
Truly, He my body liked in that fashion
And there ensued the grand fusion.

Note

On the one hand, the Āḻvār goes into raptures in contemplation of the Lord's auspicious attributes and, on the other, the Lord covets the Āḻvār's body with the same avidity with which He swallowed butter in Gokula.

kalantu eṉ āvi nalam koḷ nātaṉ
pulaṉ koḷ māṇāy nilam koṇṭāṉē. (I–8–6)

Translation

The Lord Who unto me adhered
And did my Soul make good
Took, as a Midget (Vāmaṉa) of enthralling form,
Land (of three strides) as alms.

Note

As dwarfish Vāmaṉa of bewitching personality, He enticed away Emperor Bali and made all his possessions, His own; likewise, mixing now with the Āḻvār, the Lord has taken possession of his soul and made him His sole servitor, in keeping with his essential nature.

koṇṭāṉ ēḻ viṭai, uṇṭāṉ ēḻ vaiyam,
taṉ tāmam ceytu eṉ eṉ tāṉ āṉāṉē. (I–8–7)

Translation

Tamed He the unruly bulls seven,
Held He in His stomach the worlds seven
And thinking my own thoughts (in reverse direction)
He took to my body as if it were cool heaven.

Notes

(i) To win the hand of the bewitching young damsel, Nappiṉṉai, a niece of Yaśodhā, the unruly bulls were the impediments; the Lord, as Śrī Kṛṣṇa, overcame them and secured the coveted bride. Likewise, the Āḻvār's sins, the impediments for the Lord getting at him, were rooted out by Him and the Āḻvār taken possession of.

(ii) During the period of deluge, the Lord held within Himself all the worlds and sustained them and now, He could sustain Himself only by entering the Āḻvār's soul and dissolving into it.

(iii) The Āḻvār was pining for his ascent to Heaven, dipping in the Sacred river Vrajā, coursing on its border and chanting Sāma Veda in heaven; these very thoughts the Lord would, however, think in the reverse order, namely, pining for the Āḻvār's body in Tirunakari, dipping in the river Tāmraparṇi and singing the hymns composed by the Sweet-tongued poet (Madhura Kavi) in adoration of the Āḻvār.

āṉāṉ āṉ-āyaṉ mīṉōṭu ēṉamum
tāṉ āṉāṉ, eṉṉil, tāṉ āya caṅkē. (I–8–8)

Translation

Myriads are the Lord's incarnations;
As the Cowherd He came down,
Fish, Boar and many other forms
He took, just to get hold of me.

Note

The Āḻvār feels that the innumerable Avatāras of the Lord were all for his delectation, mainly directed towards getting hold of him and uniting with him.

caṅku cakkaram aṅkaiyil koṇṭāṉ
eṅkum tāṉāya naṅkaḷ nātaṉē. (I–8–9)

Translation

Conch and discus, our Lord holds in His lovely hands
No matter where and in what form He descends.

Note

The Lord who thus incarnates, for my sake, through different gates of birth, always bears the inseparable Conch and Discus, like unto the potion carried by some to entice people. These may, however, be visible only to some Godly souls and not all. The Lord's descent could be likened to the Earthly Kings moving round their cities during nights, disguised in black clothes, to study men and matters at first hand, and locate miscreants operating under cover of darkness. The security forces or bodyguards also keep stirring about during those occasions, suitably masked, ready at hand, in an emergency call from the King. The Conch and Discus and other intimate attendants of the Lord, likewise, keep Him company during the Avatāras.

nātaṉ, ñālam koḷ pātaṉ eṉ ammāṉ,
ōtam pōl kiḷar vēta nīraṉē. (I–8–10)

Translation

The Sovereign Master (of the whole universe) whose feet
Measured all the worlds is my Sire upright fit, indeed
For the Vedas (vociferous like the ocean) to talk about.

Note

The Āḻvār, who was all along maintaining that the Supreme Lord's numerous incarnations were all for his sake, now says: "Who am I to voice forth the loving tenderness of the Lord, His uprightness which induced Him to incarnate so many times and in so many ways? None is more competent to talk about Him Who, as Tṛivikrama, set His feet on one and all without distinction of high and low, than the Vedas, vociferous like the oceanic waters, in singing His glorious traits".

nīrpurai vaṇṇaṉ-cīr caṭakōpaṉ
nērtal āyirattu ōrtal ivaiyē. (I–8–11)

Translation

These songs ten, out of the thousand
Sung by Caṭakōpaṉ reveal his view profound
That the Lord of water—tint
Is like water, pliable and transparent.

Note

The terminal stanza in each of the preceding decads set forth the good results flowing from the study or recital of the stanzas in that decad. This end-song is, however, silent in this regard; instead, it says that, in this decad, the Āḻvār has expressed his considered view, the one that is crystal-clear to him from the entire hymnal, namely, the Lord is transparent, progressive and pliable like water whose complexion He bears.

First Centum—Ninth Decad (I-9)
(Ivaiyum avaiyum)

Preamble

If the Lord's flow of grace unto the hitherto starved Soul were to be full and flooding, all of a sudden, the Subject cannot stand it and will just get swept off his feet. It is a matter of common knowledge how babes are fed through a graded course, beginning with breast milk, a little gruel some time later, and then, small bits of rice and so on. If, out of misplaced love, a parent fed the young one straightaway on adult scale–rice, curry and all that–the

result would be disastrous. As in the case of food, in the matter of imparting education also, one goes step by step. Little wonder then, the omniscient Lord regulates the influx of His grace in such a manner that the recipient is able to stomach it all right.

As is oft repeated in these pages, the Lord's grace is the sole means for attaining Him and yet, against the above background, the Āḻvār was not straightaway conferred the final bliss right at the beginning when he prayed to the Lord (opening song of Tiruviruttam) for the termination of existence in his foul body. The Āḻvār had to pass through a course of shock treatment, experiencing alternately the bliss of Divine presence and union and the cruel pangs of separation, whetting his appetite and enriching his Divine love and wisdom all the time. Before wearing a heavy ornament in the ear which is pretty delicate, one has to gradually prepare the ground by enlarging the ear-hole by stages, first inserting a small piece of string, then a thin metallic ring or chip and so on. Again, one who has been on a month's fast, either due to sickness or as a matter of penance, has to restart taking food only by stages, rice ground into a paste being smeared on the body, oral administration of gruel of low consistency, so on and so forth. The Lord, according to the Āḻvār's own admission in this decad as well as IV-5-5, unfolds unto the Āḻvār His glorious traits and deeds by stages, consistent with his capacity for in-take. (See aphorism 115 of Ācārya Hṛdayam). It would indeed be too much for the Āḻvār to bear if he were conferred, all at once, bliss enjoyed by the Eternal Angels in the Lord's close proximity in Heaven. No doubt, the Lord covets the Āḻvār's body, being the last of the series of bodies donned by him, in which the Lord has now been able to reclaim him. And yet He would not straightaway jump into the crown of his head, much as He would like to. If He did so, it would doubtless bring about the sudden collapse of the Āḻvār, like unto the pauper from birth, who suddenly comes by a sizable treasure, succumbing to the shock. He would first get near the Āḻvār, stand close to him, get into his hip, thence move upwards, to the region of his heart from there, step on to the shoulder, enter his tongue, peep through his eyes, pause for a while on the forehead and then reach the head, His ultimate destination. It is this trait of a well-regulated flow of the Lord's grace that the Āḻvār admires and brings out in this decad.

ivaiyum avaiyum uvaiyum ivarum avarum uvarum
evaiyum evarum taṉṉuḷē ākiyum ākkiyum kākkum
avaiyuḷ taṉimutal emmāṉ, kaṇṇa-pirāṉ, eṉ amutam,
cuvaiyaṉ: tiruviṉ maṇāḷaṉ eṉṉuṭaic cūḻal uḷāṉē. (I–9–1)

Translation

Around me is my Liege-Lord, my ambrosia,
The great Lover, Tiru's (Mahālakṣmī's) Consort, Kaṇṇaṉ,
The sole cause and Internal Controller, pervading all beings all over,
(Both Sentient and non-sentient) and sustaining them all within Him.

cūḻal palapala vallāṉ; tollai am kālattu ulakaik
kēḻal oṉṟu āki iṭanta kēcavaṉ eṉṉuṭai ammāṉ;
vēḻa-maruppai ocittāṉ; viṇṇavarkku eṇṇal ariyāṉ;
āḻa neṭuṅ kaṭal cērntāṉ: avaṉ eṉ arukalilāṉē. (I–9–2)

Translation

Near me is my Lord of many descents, Who, as a peerless Boar,
Once retrieved the Earth from the ocean; Killed He a tusker,
As Kēcavaṉ, smashing its tusks; much beyond the comprehension
Of Viṇṇavar (Devas), He reclined on the deep and vast ocean.

Note

There are two different episodes about the Earth having been picked out of the ocean.

(a) Hiraṇyākṣa, the demon with golden eyes, had rolled up the Earth like a mat, tucked under his arm-pit and then hid himself inside the oceanic waters. Lord Viṣṇu, at the request of the Devas, incarnated as a Boar with a gigantic tusk, bent and protruding, chased the demon under the waters and forked the Earth out on the unique tusk.

(b) At the end of the last epoch, Known as 'Pādma Kalpa' (the current one is Sveta Varāha Kalpa) Lord Śrīman Nārāyaṇa assumed the form of the Primordial Boar

with the unique tusk, long and bent, and retrieved the Earth which had gone inside the watery expanse of the deluge.

arukal ilāya perum cīr amararkaḷ āti-mutalvaṉ;
karukiya nīla naṉ mēṉi vaṇṇaṉ; centāmaraik kaṇṇaṉ;
poru-ciṟaip puḷ uvantu ēṟum pūmakaḷār taṉik kēḷvaṉ;
orukatiyiṉ cuvai tantiṭṭu, oḻivu ilaṉ eṉṉōṭu uṭaṉē. (I–9–3)

Translation

Of auspicious qualities, undiminishing and eternal,
Of sapphire hue, the Primal Lord of the Celestials,
Of red-lotus eyes, with the bird (Garuḍa) as His vehicle, of hefty wings
Pūmakaḷār's (lotus-born Lakṣmī's peerless Consort stays)
Inside me, regaling me in a number of ways.

Note

It is a rich and varied fare that the Lord serves to the **Āḻvār**, having taken possession of him and shifted unto his body which now constitutes the seat of His entire cosmic activities. The Lord exhibits:

(a) His auspicious qualities, eternal and unlimited;

(b) His Overlordship of the Celestials in Heaven;

(c) His exquisite form of sapphire hue;

(d) His bewitching looks emanating from the red-lotus eyes, full of grace;

(e) Garuḍā, His mighty vehicle, with tough plumes;

(f) His Lordship of 'Śrī', the Divine Mother, the Goddess of affluence.

These correspond to the six rasas (appetisers) which enter our dishes, forming a well-integrated meal.

uṭaṉ amar kātal makaḷir tirumakaḷ maṇmakaḷ āyar
maṭa makaḷ eṉṟu ivar mūvar; āḷum ulakamum mūṉṟē;
uṭaṉ avai okka viḻuṅki, ālilaic cērntavaṉ emmāṉ,
kaṭal mali māyap perumāṉ, kaṇṇaṉ eṉ okkalaiyāṉē. (I–9–4)

Translation

My Lord's favourite spouses three
Are Tirumakaḷ, Maṇmakaḷ, Āyarmaṭamakaḷ; the worlds three
He rules over, He ate them up simultaneously
And on a fig-leaf, during deluge, lay;
Of wondrous deeds and glory, bigger than ocean,
Kaṇṇaṉ, my Liege-Lord is on my hip seated now.

Notes

(i) The Universal Lord sits on the hip of the **Āḻvār** even as He sat on the hip of Yaśōda, during His Avatāra, as Śrī Kṛṣṇa.

(ii) The three worlds referred to are the Svarga, up above, the Underworld, down below (Pāthāla) and the Earth, in between. The three Spouses of the Lord in His transcendental setting are: Śrī (Tirumakaḷ), Bhū (Maṇmakaḷ) and Nīla (Āyar maṭa makaḷ).

okkalai vaittu mulaippāl uṇ eṉṟu tantiṭa vāṅkic
cekkam ceka aṉṟu avaḷpāl uyir ceka uṇṭa perumāṉ;
nakka pirāṉōṭu ayaṉum intiraṉum mutalāka
okkavum tōṟṟiya īcaṉ māyaṉ eṉ neñciṉ uḷāṉē. (I–9–5)

Translation

The Supreme Lord Who created one and all–
Ayaṉ (Brahmā), Nakkapirāṉ (Rudra), Intiraṉ (Indra) and others of wondrous traits
And deeds-Who, sitting on the hip of that devil,
(Pūtanā), Sucked her breast and life alike, stays now in my heart.

māyaṉ eṉ neñciṉ uḷḷāṉ, maṟṟum evarkkum atuvē;
kāyamum cīvaṉum tāṉē; kālum eriyum avaṉē;
cēyaṉ, aṇiyaṉ, evarkkum cintaikkum kōcaram allaṉ;
tūyaṉ tuyakkaṉ mayakkaṉ eṉṉuṭait tōḷiṇaiyāṉē. (I–9–6)

Translation

Ha! right in my heart is Māyaṉ (the wonderful Lord),
As in the case of none else; body and soul, wind and fire,

He at once is; near (unto some) and yet far (unto others),
Beyond mental reach of one and all is my impeccable Lord,
(Unto the unfortunate sceptics), elusive and confounding,
He is now on my shoulders firmly mounted.

Notes

(i) The Supreme Lord controls the bodies of the different species of beings and the Souls inside them, the elements and all. Easily accessible to the devout who depend solely on His voluntary grace, He is beyond the comprehension of those who seek to know Him through their own efforts. Of easy grasp by the recipients of His grace, He is elusive unto others, who, by dint of their Kārmik influence, either doubt His very existence or comprehend Him the wrong way, as one on a par with other minor deities, as one without form and attributes, so on and so forth.

(ii) Speaking about clarity and confusion, precision and prevarication, in the above context, it is worth mentioning the following incident by way of illustrating that devotion and conviction go hand in hand and where devotion is wanting, there doubt, ignorance and bewilderment prevail.

(iii) Among the many listeners of Śrī Parāśara Bhaṭṭar's scintillating discourses, there was a learned Pandit whom Bhaṭṭar, however, treated with no more than the barest ordinary courtesy. On the other hand, there was an aged Śrī Vaiṣṇava without any academic learning, whom Bhaṭṭar received with great respect and attention. A third party who felt puzzled over this marked disparity in treatment, and that too, in the reverse order, reverently approached Bhaṭṭar and prayed for clarification. Bhaṭṭar coolly replied, "You may come tomorrow as usual and watch. The parties in question will also come and I will tell you what it is". The morning came, the Pandit first came and paid obeisance to Bhaṭṭar who, however, received him as usual with ordinary politeness; the third party was also with them by now, when Bhaṭṭar asked the learned Pandit: "Whom have you settled in your mind as the 'Paratattva' (ultimate Truth)?" The Pandit went about it, in a ponderous manner, full of doubts and uncertainty, quoting certain texts in favour of the Supremacy of Brahmā (who is but the demi-urge, the appointed agent for creation), some in favour of the overlordship of the All-pervading Viṣṇu and some others, establishing the Sovereign sway of Rudra (the appointed agent for destruction). Ultimately, he wound up by betraying his helplessness that, in the face of these conflicting texts, it would not be possible to arrive at any conclusion. At this stage, the aforesaid elderly person also arrived. Receiving him with great reverence, Bhaṭṭar asked: "Pray, who to you is the Ultimate Truth?" Pat came the reply, with pin-point precision: "I know of none other than Lord Śrīman Nārāyaṇa, whom you discourse about, all these days; I also know of no other truth than what you preach to us daily, namely, Śrī Rāmānuja is my sole Saviour, the Means as well as the End of my salvation". Turning to the questioner of the previous day (third party) Bhaṭṭar said "I do hope You are now convinced that my attention to the elderly person is not misplaced. Now say, to whom I should bend". Need it be added that the questioner was fully satisfied?

tōḷ-iṇai mēlum, naṉ mārpiṉ mēlum, cuṭar-muṭi mēlum,
tāḷ-iṇai mēlum, puṉainta taṇ am tuḷāy uṭai ammāṉ,
kēḷ-iṇai oṉrum ilātāṉ; kiḷarum cuṭar-oḷi mūrtti;
nāḷ aṇaintu oṉrum akalāṉ; eṉṉuṭai nāviṉ uḷāṉē. (I–9–7)

Translation

With His shoulders, winsome chest, the lustrous crown
And feet, by tulacī, cool and nice, gaily adorned,

The peerless Lord of mounting radiance and glowing renown,
Tightens His hold on me, day by day, and now rests He in my tongue.

Notes

(i) Even as the wife bedecks and beautifies herself to excite the special fascination of her husband, the Lord bedecks Himself with tulaci, which holds out special fascination for the Āḻvār and mingles with him.

(ii) The sequence of decoration indicated in the stanza is appreciated by Śrī Parāśara Bhaṭṭar in his own inimitable way, as follows:

It is but meet, the great Warrior that the Lord is, He decorates first of all His sinewy shoulders bearing His weapons, namely, Conch and Discus; next comes the winsome chest, the seat of the Divine Mother, needing decoration for Her exhilaration; the crown comes thereafter only and the rest goes to the Lord's feet, always coveted by the devotees, where their salvation lies.

(iii) *Peerless Lord*: That the Lord is of incomparable excellence is brought out succinctly, later on, in III-1-2, the comparisons with lotus, gold etc, touching only a fringe of the subject. The things with which the Lord is compared actually suffer in comparison and lag far behind Him, rather pale into insignificance.

nāviṉuḷ niṉṟu malarum ñāṉak kalaikaḷukku ellām
āviyum ākkaiyum tāṉē; aḻippōtu aḷippavaṉ tāṉē;
pū iyal nāl-taṭam tōḷaṉ; poru paṭai āḻi caṅku ēntum
kāvi naṉ mēṉik kamalak kaṇṇaṉ; eṉ kaṇṇiṉ uḷāṉē. (I–9–8)

Translation

The arts, one and all, blossoming from the tongue,
Their body (sound) and soul (meaning),
Their exit and entrance are by Him Controlled,

Conch and Discus, His lovely shoulders four do sport,
The lotus-eyed of bewitching charm has my eyes entered.

Notes

(i) Certain branches of knowledge become extinct due to lack of propagation, due again to lack of interest or adequate intelligence to grasp them and various other causes; the Lord allows them to die out and gets them resuscitated, as and when He deems it necessary.

(ii) C.f. IV-2 and 3 of Bhagavad Gītā where Lord Kṛṣṇa says that the Karma Yoga, explained by Him long back to Vivaswat, by him to Manu,and by Manu to Ikṣvāku, was lost through long lapse of time and the same Yoga was again being taught by the Lord to Arjuna (at the appropriate time).

kamalak kaṇṇaṉ, eṉ kaṇṇiṉ uḷḷāṉ, kāṇpaṉ avaṉ kaṇkaḷālē;
amalaṅkaḷ āka viḻikkum; aimpulaṉum avaṉ mūrtti;
kamalattu ayaṉ nampi-taṉṉaik kaṇṇutalāṉoṭum tōṟṟi,
amalat teyvattoṭu ulakam ākki, eṉ neṟṟi uḷāṉē. (I–9–9)

Translation

The lotus-eyed Lord, right in my eyes,
Could by me be seen through His eyes,
Which destroyed my nescience and made.
All my senses five subserve Him; He made
The lotus-based Ayaṉ (Brahmā), Rudra, on whose forehead
Is an extra eye, other Devas and rest of the worlds,
(He of such eminence) is now right on my forehead.

Note

The Lord, hitherto not visible, could now be seen in all His grandeur and enjoyed by the Āḻvār, not only through his eyes but all his other senses as well. This was possible only due to the Lord's redemptive grace, shed in super-abundance through His benevolent looks. Finding that the Āḻvār could assimilate this grand experience, the Lord next passed

on to the Āḻvār's forehead on the penultimate lap of His Journey to the Āḻvār's crown.

neṟṟiyuḷ niṉṟu eṉṉai āḷum nirai malarp-pātaṅkaḷ cūṭik
kaṟṟait tuḷāy muṭik kōlak kaṇṇa-pirāṉait toḻuvār
oṟṟaip piṟai aṇintāṉum nāṉmukaṉum intiraṉum
maṟṟai amararum ellām; vantu eṉatu ucciyuḷāṉē. (I–9–10)

Translation

The lotus feet of the Lord, wearing round bands of tuḷacī dense,
Resting on my forehead, are worshipped and worn on their heads,
By the wearer of crescent Moon (Śiva), Nānmukaṉ (Brahmā), Intiraṉ (Indra)
And all other Amarar (Devas); Such an eminent One
Shot up from my forehead, right into my head.

Notes

(i) Even the exalted Śiva, Brahmā, Indra and other Devas have to queue up, seeking the appropriate time for the propitiation of the Lord. But He, in turn, has got into the Āḻvār's head, seeking the most appropriate time for it.

(ii) In the first line of this stanza (original text) reference has been made to the Lord's pair of lotus feet, planted on the Āḻvār's forehead, and these feet were worshipped by Śiva, Brahmā, Indra and other Devas and borne on their heads. This points to the insignia or the caste-mark worn by Śrī Vaiṣṇavites and from the wording of the stanza, it could be assumed that the Āḻvār bore, on his forehead, the Lord's pair of feet with a lotus base and not a single foot alone, as a section of Śrī Vaiṣṇavites has chosen to depict.

ucciyuḷḷē niṟkum tēva tēvaṟkuk kaṇṇa-pirāṉukku
iccaiyuḷ cella uṇartti, vaṇ kurukūrc caṭakōpaṉ
ic coṉṉa ayirattuḷḷē ivaiyum ōr pattu empirāṟku
niccalum viṇṇappam ceyya niḷ kaḻal ceṉṉi porumē. (I–9–11)

Translation

The Lord's longish feet will for ever crown
The heads of those who (but once) recite these songs ten,
Out of the thousand sung by Caṭakōpaṉ of Kurukūr, narrating
Just as he experienced, how Kaṇṇapirāṉ, the Supreme Lord, migrated from one limb of his to another and alighted on his crown.

Note

The Supreme Lord, adorning the heads of the exalted Devas, coveted the Āḻvār's head so much that He got into it by stages, and there being no higher place to step into, the Lord stays on there. In other words, the Āḻvār's head is the new abode of the Lord. This is indeed the limit for the Lord's loving condescension (Sauśīlya)! Here then is the mystic realisation that God loves His Subjects in the same way they pine for union with Him.

First Centum—Tenth Decad (I-10)
(Poru mā nīḷ paṭai)

Preamble

In this decad, the Lord's voluntary or spontaneous grace is prominently brought out and extolled by the Āḻvār. Some Ācāryas, however, hold that the Āḻvār gives vent to his boundless joy resulting from the Lord's contact with him, limb by limb, mentioned in the preceding decad. The remarkable approach of Śrī Parāśara Bhaṭṭar, that intellectual giant of extraordinary divine fervour to this decad is as follows:

In the preceding decad, the Supreme Lord was shown to have finally got on to the Āḻvār's head. Could there be any mystic experience more exalted than this? It was now up to the Lord to keep it up without once again snatching Himself away from the Āḻvār. That apart, the highest bliss, thus conferred by the Lord on the Āḻvār, led him on, to an introspection as to how he came by it. A thread-bare analysis of his own attainments reveals that he has none whatsoever and, at best, it could be said that he was God-bent

and free from hatred for Him. Can it be said that a lemon fruit has secured a Kingdom, simply because a subject reverently placed a lemon fruit at the feet of a munificent King and got a liberal gift of territory, at the King's pleasure? It is absolutely impossible, rather, it would be preposterous to correlate the slender means of the Individual, as good as non-existent, with the 'End', of mighty dimensions, as in the example cited above. Verily, the Lord is the root-cause even for the little merit, if any, acquired by the Individual, down the ages, as the latter was dowered with body and limbs, and put on a career of useful activity, only by Him. And so, the present ecstatic experience of the Āḻvār is traceable only to the Lord's redemptive grace and, little wonder, the Āḻvār thaws down in grateful acknowledgement of the Lord's benefaction, totally unrelated to the merit in him.

It will be seen from the above exposition that Bhaṭṭar lays emphasis on the Lord's redemptive grace besides sharing the view of the other Ācāryas, so far as the Āḻvār's ecstatic experience is concerned.

poru mā nīḷ paṭai āḻi caṅkattoṭu
tiru mā nīḷ kaḻal ēḻ ulakum toḻa,
oru māṇik kuṟaḷ āki, nimirnta ak
karu māṇikkam eṉ kaṇṇuḷatu ākumē. (I–10–1)

Translation

The peerless Vamāna bearing the martial conch and discus,
The majestic weapons, Whose feet, long and lovely,
All the seven worlds worshipped, as He grew into space,
That blue-gem of a Lord is unto me visible!

Note

Even in his dreams, Mahābali had not conjured up the vision of the charming Lord presenting Himself before him, in all His grandeur and asking for a gift. Likewise, the Āḻvār had not the remotest idea that the Lord would ever come to him and reveal His exquisite charm to his naked eyes. No wonder then, he goes into raptures over the Lord's spontaneous grace. This is indeed the key stanza for this decad.

kaṇṇuḷḷē niṟkum-kātaṉmaiyāl toḻil–
eṇṇilum varum; eṉ iṉi vēṇṭuvam-
maṇṇum nīrum eriyum nal vāyuvum
viṇṇumāy viriyum em pirāṉaiyē? (I–10–2)

Translation

My Lord hath as His body the elements five
And as the sprawling Universe expands; worshipped with love
He makes Himself visible, nay, for the mere count.
What more does one (for salvation) want?

Notes

(i) It is by no means surprising that the Lord Who is bound by the deep love of the devotees, always keeps Himself in their vicinity. But the Āḻvār now touches upon the Lord's overwhelming generosity in presenting Himself even to those who utter the number twentysix, in the course of casual enumeration. The non-sentient body has 24 ingredients, such as Mind, senses, tanmātrās etc; the sentient soul which takes possession of the body and directs it, is the 25th tattva (principle) and the Lord is the 26th tattva, controlling, as He does, both the body and the Soul which constitute, as it were, His bodies. This explains the significance of number 26, denoting the Lord.

(ii) The Āḻvār exclaims: "When the Lord can be got at even by casual enumeration, what more do we need for our salvation?" By this, he means that God's grace is the sole means of salvation and nothing is needed on our part. There are no special conditions supporting His grace which operates unasked and unaided. What is wanted is non-resistance or non-rejection when Grace is offered. When it was pointed out to the great Ācārya, Nampiḷḷai, by one of his disciples, named, Vēlveṭṭippiḷḷai that Śrī Rāma offered Śaraṇāgati to the king of the oceans, facing east and observing other ritualistic formalities, the learned Preceptor elucidated that it was done so by Śrī Rāma as a matter of course, in keeping with his orthodox

background and not as something mandatory. As a matter of fact, Śrī Rāma resorted to the said 'Śaraṇāgati' only on the advice of Vibhīṣaṇa who, however, did not have a single dip in the ocean before he sought asylum at the feet of Śrī Rāma. The lesson to be learnt from this contrasting picture is that 'Śaraṇāgati' (surrender to the Lord's loving grace) could be performed in any manner, with or without a bath, the one who hasn't had his bath already, not being under any compulsion to take a bath and, conversely, the one who has had his bath already, need not defile himself by way of emulating the former.

em pirāṉai, entai tantai tantaikkum
tampirāṉai, taṇ-tāmaraik kaṇṇaṉai,
kompu arāvu nuṇ nēr iṭai mārpaṉai,
em pirāṉait toḻāy, maṭa neñcamē. (I–10–3)

Translation

My docile mind! bow unto the Benefactor great
Of our entire clan, the lotus-eyed Lord,
Shedding cool grace, bearing on His winsome chest,
The Mother Divine, lovely and thin-waisted.

Note

The Lord's tender solicitude for the devotees, overlooking their countless transgressions, springs from His close contact with the Divine Mother who is the very personification of grace.

neñcamē! nallai! nallai! uṉṉaip peṟṟāl
eṉ ceyyōm? iṉi eṉṉa kuṟaiviṉam?
maintaṉai malarāḷ maṇavāḷaṉait
tuñcumpōtum viṭātu toṭar kaṇṭāy. (I–10–4)

Translation

Well done, my mind! what is there
We can't secure when you are here?
Well, is there anything we would want anymore?

Malarāḷ's (Lotus-born Lakṣmī's) Consort, ever young,
Leave not, even if you find me straying.

Note

The Āḻvār's mind exhorted by him in the preceding stanza to worship the Lord, responded so well that he now pats it on its back and prays that it shall cling to the Lord under all circumstances. The Āḻvār apprehends the off-chance of his shrinking back from the Lord once again, when his own humility haunts him, in dire contrast to the Lord's overwhelming superiority. Right now, the Āḻvār counsels his mind, never to get parted from the Lord, whatever might be his own vicissitudes.

kaṇṭāyē, neñcē! karumaṅkaḷ vāykkiṉṟu ōr
eṉ tāṉum iṉṟiyē vantu iyalumāṟu;
uṇṭāṉai ulaku ēḻum ōr mūvaṭi
koṇṭāṉaik kaṇṭukoṇṭaṉai nīyumē. (I–10–5)

Translation

Haven't you seen, my mind! how things occur,
With no pre-thoughts in us? did the worlds seven
Know that the Lord would, during deluge, sustain
Them all? Who knew that the Lord would measure
The worlds in three strides and set His feet on them?
Well, did you ever know that you would see Him?

Note

The Lord extends His grace out of His own sweet will, unasked and un-premeditated by us. It is this spontaneous grace of the Lord that Bhaṭṭar has emphasised all along in this decad.

nīyum nāṉum in nērniṟkil, mēl maṟṟōr
nōyum cārkoṭāṉ; neñcamē! coṉṉēṉ:
tāyum tantaiyum āy, iv ulakiṉil
vāyum īcaṉ, maṇivaṇṇaṉ entaiyē. (I–10–6)

Translation

My mind! if you and I continue in this state,
Our sapphire—hued Lord, Master of all,
Who is our Father and Mother as well,
Will rid us of all ills, let me truly state.

Note

Addressing his mind, the Āḻvār says: " Our eternal Lord Who endears Himself to us like the Mother, whose love is proverbial, chastises like the Father, bent upon reforming us, revealed His resplendent form like unto a sapphire and enthralled me. If you and I persevere in this state, the Lord will see to it that we enjoy this perennial bliss for all time, keeping away all ills and evils ".

entaiyē! eṉṟum, em perumāṉ! eṉṟum,
cintaiyuḷ vaippaṉ, colluvaṉ, pāviyēṉ-
entai! em perumāṉ! eṉṟu vāṉavar
cintaiyuḷ vaittuc collum celvaṉaiyē. (I–10–7)

Translation

The Sovereign Lord, the Celestials contemplate
And sing His glory as their Progenitor (Primate);
How dare I, a sinner, likewise meditate
And call Him my Father, my Master and all that?

Note

The Scriptures warn that one shall not utter anything ominous (inauspicious), lest it should actually come to pass. In the fourth stanza of this decad, the Āḻvār, while exhorting his mind, apprehended the frightful possibility of his moving away from the Lord, haunted by his own lowliness. And here we find him suffering from that obsession again and so soon!

celva nāraṇaṉ eṉṟa col kēṭṭalum,
malkum kaṇ paṉi; nāṭuvaṉ, māyamē!
allum naṉ pakalum iṭaiviṭu iṉṟi
nalki, eṉṉai viṭāṉ, nampi nampiyē. (I–10–8)

Translation

' Celvanāraṇaṉ, ' the word uttered by some one,
Heard I, and lo! with tears my eyes did run;
Searched I whither He is gone, oh, what a marvel!
Thro' friendly days and nights with no interval,
The perfect Lord, full of grace, tries to win
My love and elects with me ever to remain.

Note

" How unworthy and unbecoming, " the Āḻvār rattled, " would be the union of one so vile and abject like me and the Supreme Lord, pure and exalted beyond words! " And so, he fled away and hid himself behind a ruined wall, in a remote corner, with little or no scope of hearing and talking about God-head. Thus he would forget all about God and, as a further precaution against possible detection and intrusion on his privacy, he even put a veil over his head. But what happened? A wayfarer, with a heavy headload, rested a while there, after unburdening himself. While discharging the load, he ejaculated ' Śrīman Nārāyaṇa ' ! in a relaxing mood. The moment this magic word struck the ears of the Āḻvār, he got himself transformed into the ecstatic state, described in this stanza, as above. The Saint was indeed most agreeably surprised that the Lord should shed on him His grace and affection in such super-abundance and reclaim him despite his determination to forget all about Him, for fear of tainting Him. Oh, what a grip the Lord has over His chosen subjects!

nampiyai, teṉ kuṟuṅkuṭi niṉṟa, ac
cempoṉē tikaḻum tiru mūrttiyai,
umpar vāṉavar āti am cōtiyai,
em pirāṉai, eṉ colli maṟappanō ? (I–10–9)

Translation

On what pretext shall I forget my Lord of dazzling charm,
The Progenitor of the exalted denizens of heaven,

The perfect Lord Who, in Tentirukkuṟuṅkuṭi stands
With an exquisite Form that does like red gold gleam?

Notes

(i) Asked whether he would not forget the Lord like the worldlings and go in pursuit of food and raiment, the Āḻvār says, he just does not know how and on what grounds he can forget the Lord. By exhibiting His exquisite charm in His Arcā form at Tirukkuṟuṅkuṭi (deep down, in Tamil Nadu), He enthralled the Āḻvār. How then could he forget Him? Could it be on the ground that He is not perfect, that He is not near at hand, that His form is not attractive, that He is not exalted, that He does not extend any benefits? No, none of these grounds will hold good, as could be seen from this stanza.

(ii) The Lord, in His Arcā (Iconic) form in Tirukkuṟuṅkuṭi, is referred to as the perfect one in whom all the auspicious qualities converge in a perfect measure. No doubt, the qualities of saulabhya (easy accessibility), Sauśīlya (condescension), Vātsalya (tender solicitude) etc. are also displayed by the Lord in His 'Para' or transcendent form in the High Heavens. But, in that land of perfect bliss and perpetual splendour, these qualities can be hardly perceptible in such a marked degree as they are in this land of darkness, delusion and despair. There is all the difference between a light burning in broad day light and the one shining forth in a dark room. (Īṭu)

maṟappum ñāṉamum nāṉ oṉṟu uṇarntilaṉ;
maṟakkum eṉṟu centāmaraik kaṇṇoṭu,
maṟappu aṟa, eṉ uḷḷē maṉṉiṉāṉ taṉṉai
maṟappaṉō, iṉi yāṉ eṉ maṇiyaiyē? (I–10–10)

Translation

I know not what it is to feel or forget
And yet, the Lord, with red-lotus-eyes, does apprehend

That I'll forget Him and, as one forewarned,
He has lodged Himself firm in my heart;
The gem of a Lord, shall I any more forget?

Notes

(i) The Āḻvār feels that he is incapable of thinking and there is, therefore, no question of his forgetting either. The Lord is, however, anxious that the knowledge now dawned on the Āḻvār as a result of His union with him, should remain intact, leaving no more scope for his sliding down or slipping off. He has, therefore, lodged Himself firmly inside the Āḻvār, casting His benevolent glances on him.

(ii) Who will cast away a priceless gem when it comes to one's hand, instead of treasuring it and enjoying it all the time?

maṇiyai, vāṉavar kaṇṇaṉai, taṉṉatu ōr
aṇiyai, teṉ kurukūrc caṭakōpaṉ col-
paṇi cey āyirattuḷ ivai pattuṭaṉ
taṇivilar kaṟparēl, kalvi vāyumē. (I–10–11)

Translation

Those that learn with zeal and thirst insatiable these songs ten,
Out of the thousand sung by Tenkurukūr Caṭakōpaṉ,
As a matter of service unto the Lord of sapphire hue,
Himself a jewel unique, overlord of the Celestials,
Will with knowledge divine be filled.

Notes

(i) In accordance with the text of the song, those that learn these ten songs will have their fill of knowledge. The ultimate aim of knowledge is Divine Service and so, this knowledge should blossom into service.

(ii) The blue-gem is likened to the Lord in a number of ways. In it, there is a happy blending, as in the case of the supreme Lord, of 'Paratva' and 'Saulabhya', the two extremes of paramountcy and simplicity. With all its high intrinsic value, the gem can be easily carried, tied at one end of the garment''.

(iii) It is common knowledge that jewels beautify the wearer. In the case of the Lord, however, He beautifies the jewels worn by Him and He is Himself the most attractive of all jewels.

THE CENTUM, IN RETROSPECT (DECAD-WISE SUMMARY)

(I-1): Right in the opening line of the first song of the first decad, Saint Nammāḷvār characterises God as one with perfections, all of the nature of inexhaustible bliss and love, the natural repository of innumerable auspicious traits of unlimited dimensions. The Āḷvār gratefully revels in the blissful knowledge of the Supreme Lord, shorn of all doubts, discrepancies and deviations, dowered on him by the Lord Himself, in the exercise of His spontaneous grace and exhorts his mind to take refuge in the Lord's distress-dispelling, dazzling feet, being the sure and certain means of salvation. The Lord's greatness and transcedent glory, elucidated in the *opening decad* have been briefly set out below. He is at once the Material Cause as well as the Operative Cause and Instrumental Cause of all life and being; He is the one and only Giver either directly or through other minor deities, whose favours their respective votaries seek; He is all-pervading like the Soul inside the body;

(I-2): Far from being selfish and self-centred, the Āḷvār wishes to share with his fellow beings, wallowing in the stye of wordly life, all that knowledge graciously dowered on him by the Lord. He, therefore, exhorts them, *in the second decad*, to give up the elusive and obnoxious pleasures of worldly life, disengage themselves from the erroneous notions of 'I' and 'Mine' and dedicate themselves to the appreciation of the limitless wealth and splendour of the Supreme Lord, thereby reaping the rich harvest of eternal bliss and beatitude. True renunciation is of the mind, as distinguished from mere bodily replacements, such as living a secluded life in a remote forest. In this, his first address to the fellow-beings, the Āḷvār also teaches them how and where to pray, by giving out the substance of the eight-syllabled 'Tirumantra'—Aum Namo (Nārāyaṇāya);

(I-3): Lest his addressees in the preceding decad be scared of the Lord's sovereignty as the Supreme Master of the whole universe, the Āḷvār puts them at ease by depicting, *in the third decad*, the Lord's disarming simplicity and His easy-accessibility (Saulabhya) and emphasising that, to those who turn their minds unto Him, He is easily accessible but difficult of attainment by others;

(I-4): *In the fourth decad*, the Āḷvār is seen transformed (figuratively of course) as a 'Nāyakī' (female lover) pining for immediate union with the Supreme Lord and sending some birds, as her emissaries, to the Lord reclining on the 'Milk-ocean', the seat of the Lord's creative activity, invoking His trait of forgiveness (aparāda sahatva). (The winged birds typify the efficient preceptors, possessed of the mighty wings of knowledge (Jñāna) and conduct (anuṣṭāna), a happy blending of both. (This is the first of four such decads in the entire hymnal, the other three being VI-1, VI-8 and IX-7.)

(I-5): The Saint brings into focus, the Lord's trait of loving condescension (Sauśīlya) or mixing freely with the lowliest, *in the fifth decad;* the Lord, bent

upon having a rapport with the Āḻvār, shakes off the latter's inferiority complex inducing him, quite often, to retreat from the Lord for fear of defiling One, so exalted.

(I-6): The Lord's 'Svārādhatva' (easy worshippability) is emphasised *in the sixth decad;* the outward offerings may be trifles but, in God's eyes, they carry much weight, when offered in humility, with loving devotion;

(I-7): Easy-worshippability apart, the Lord is highly adorable because of His extraordinary sweetness; this is highlighted by the Āḻvār, *in the seventh decad;*

(I-8): *In the eighth decad*, the Āḻvār brings to the fore, the Lord's trait of uprightness (ārjava or rujuḥ) His transparence in word, deed and thought, free from sophistry, duplicity, mental reservation, mischievous distortion, etc.;

(I-9): The Omniscient Lord regulates the influx of His grace in such a manner that the recipient is able to stomach it all right. *In the ninth decad,* as well as the fifth decad of the fourth centum, according to the Āḻvār's own admission, the Lord unfolds unto him, His glorious traits and wondrous deeds, only by stages, consistent with his capacity for in-take (Sātmia bhoga pradatva). Being the last of the staggering series of bodies donned by the Āḻvār, in which alone the Lord could reclaim him, He naturally covets his body. And yet, He would not jump straightaway into the crown of the Āḻvār's head; He would first stand close to him, get into his hip and thence move upwards, limb by limb. Had the Lord not adopted this process of gradual occupation of the Āḻvār's body, the latter would have just collapsed, like unto a pauper from birth, who suddenly comes by a sizeable treasure;

(I-10): *In the concluding) decad of this centum*, the Lord's voluntary or spontaneous grace (nirhetuka kṛpā) is brought out prominently and extolled by the Āḻvār who also gives vent to his boundless joy resulting from the Lord's contact with him, limb by limb, as set out in the ninth decad.

BOOK II

Second Centum—First Decad (II-1) (Vāyum tirai)

Preamble

In the last stanza of the preceding decad, the Āḻvār who had already conjured up the vision of the Lord as having entered his body and gone right up to his head, referred to the Lord as the blue gem, overlord of the Celestials and a very attractive jewel, by himself. Each one of these features of the Lord was so fascinating that the Āḻvār could not resist the immediate urge to enjoy them outwardly. The enjoyment, longed for, did not, however, materialise instantly and the Āḻvār was thrown into a state of deep dejection, reduced to the abject position of a forlorn lover. The Āḻvār, thus transformed into a female lover (Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī), pining for her beloved Lord, moves into a garden on the sea-shore to bemoan her separation. It may be recalled that she was in a similar predicament earlier, when she sent the birds etc, as her emissaries to the Lord—See I-4. But then, she is worse off now, not finding any one to carry her message to the Lord. The self-same stork which she had commissioned earlier now looms in her eyes as a comrade-in-distress. The stork's natural complexion is white but the Āḻvār thinks that it is a case of decoloration due to the pangs of separation from the Lord, experienced by it. The Aṉṟil birds of opposite sex always stay together and even during sleep keep their bills locked in each other's mouth. The moment the bills get unlocked, they wake up and start crying. Unaware of this natural sequence, Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī thinks that these birds cry out their agony of separation from the Lord, like her. The wind, ever on the move, appears to the Āḻvār to go about frantically in search of the Lord; the clouds, unleashing rain-water, look like shedding tears of grief due to separation from the Lord; likewise, the waning of the Moon, the surging, up and down, of the waves, the burning of the lamp and all other natural phenomena are invested by the love-lorn Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī with her own poignancy and she bemoans their lot as well. This sets the pace and pattern of this decad, pin pointing the Lord's quality of making his devotees mad with God-love.

Here is an interesting comparison: Lakṣmaṇa, while pleading that he should be allowed to accompany Śrī Rāma into exile, cited the example of the fish failing to survive without water, thereby indicating that Śrī Rāma was unto Lakṣmaṇa what water is unto fish. But here is Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī who feels that the fish, water and all things subsist on the Lord and cannot brook separation from Him! The Āḷvār addresses these Comrades-in-distress commiserating with them in their sad plight. It is worth noting that Śloka 15 and the following few ślokas in the last chapter of the tenth skanda of Bhāgavatam run in a similar vein.

vāyum tirai ukaḷum kāṉal maṭa nārāy!
āyum, amar-ulakum tuñcilum nī tuñcāyāl;
nōyum payalaimaiyum mītu-ūra emmēpōl,
nīyum tirumālāl neñcam kōḷ-paṭṭāyē? (II–1–1)

Translation

Sleep you don't, You young stork in the sea-shore garden!
Though my mother and Heavens too have into slumber gone;
The whole of your body is white with grief great;
Like me, have you unto Tirumāl lost your heart?

Notes

(i) Not falling within the mischief of 'tamas' (inertia), there is no question of the Heavens going into slumber. The wonder of it is that even the Heavens, never known to sleep, have gone to sleep, but the poor stork doesn't sleep! The (gnostic) mother would not sleep because there was a time when she was agitating her mind about finding a suitable match for her highly evolved daughter (Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī), and now again, the mother cannot sleep when the daughter is in such a state of mental agony, separated from her Lord. Even such a mother has gone to sleep but the stork wouldn't sleep. Surely, its affliction must be very heavy.

(ii) The Āḷvār thinks that decoloration has set in throughout the body of the stork like the fast-spreading poison, and that is why it is white all over. About the decoloration of the lover due to the gloom of separation, see notes below I-4-4.

(iii) The soul can neither be split nor burnt, neither wetted nor dried up, and yet the Āḷvār has, in several places, referred to his getting split, burnt, wetted and dried up; the inanimate mind is raised by him to the status of an animate being and he extols it and denounces it alternately, according to its tempo and behaviour; each sense-organ, each faculty, is made to acquire an independent stature of its own, as if it is a separate animate entity by itself and these compete with each other in the matter of God-enjoyment, exceeding and even transcending their functional limitations (III-8); God-love, engendered in the Āḷvār also acquires a similar stature and is said to thaw down like ice. And now, the Āḷvār sees the very elements, water, wind and fire, as comrades-in-distress, and weeps along with them, bespeaking the intensity of his God-thirst, not conforming to the conventional norms of thinking and behaviour. (aphorism 132 of Ācārya Hṛdayaṁ).

kōḷ-paṭṭa cintaiyaiyāyk kūrvāya aṉṟilē!
cēṇ-paṭṭa yāmaṅkaḷ cērātu iraṅkutiyāl;
āḷ-paṭṭa emmēpōl nīyum aravu-aṇaiyāṉ
tāḷ-paṭṭa taṇ-tulāyt tāmam kāmuṟṟāyē? (II–1–2)

Translation

Ye Aṉṟil with beak sharp, down-hearted that you are,
Your voice is feeble and without sleep you suffer
During long spells of night; did you also covet
As I do, the cool tulaci garland at the feet
Of the Lord, reclining on His serpent couch?

Note

Just as he was addressing the stork, the Āḷvār heard the Aṉṟil birds in the neighbouring palmyra tree, crying out their agony of separation, as and when their bills got unlocked during sleep, vide also the preamble to this decad. The

Āḻvār extends his sympathy to these birds, looking upon them as comrades-in-distress.

kāmuṟṟa kaiyaṟavōṭu ellē irāppakal
nī muṟṟak kaṇ tuyilāy; neñcu uruki ēṅkutiyāl;
tī muṟṟat teṉ ilaṅkai uṭṭiṉāṉ tāḷ nayanta
yām uṟṟatu uṟṟāyō? vāḻi! kaṉai kaṭalē. (II–1–3)

Translation

You languish without sleep, You roaring Sea!
Both day and night, and your heart is watery, I see;
Are you with grief afflicted as we are,
Not attaining the feet of our Lord Who by fire
Destroyed Laṅkā? May you from grief be free and prosper!

Notes

(i) The Sea can be said to sleep when it is silent without throwing the waves up. But the waves are surging up and down all the time, be it day or night; this sleeplessness is attributed by the Āḻvār to its separation from the Lord.

(ii) The sea roars and it is mere sound with no meaning, just like the indistinct sound coming from a throat, choked with grief. The Āḻvār is inclined to think that the poor thing is down with grief, too deep for words.

(iii) The Āḻvār would appear to tell the sea: "Sītā was also a woman like me, and Śrī Rāma languished without food and sleep, bunded the Sea, a herculean task indeed, and got at her. He is, however, unmindful of me. Do you also feel tortured by His indifference, as I do?"

kaṭalum malaiyum vicumpum tuḻāy empōl
cuṭar koḷ irāppakal tuñcāyāl, taṉ vāṭāy!
aṭal koḷ paṭai-āḻi ammāṉaik kāṇpāṉ nī
uṭalam nōy uṟṟāyō, ūḻitōṟu ūḻiyē? (II–1–4)

Translation

Do you from chronic malady suffer, you chill wind?
Like me you sleep not, by day or night, but try to find
Groping thro' space, hill and dale, our mighty Lord
Who does, in sweet array, Conch and Discuss wield.

Notes

(i) If the wind is chill, the Āḻvār thinks it is due to delirium; if the wind moves about, all over, all the time, gathering all the dust in the process, as is its wont, the Āḻvār thinks that it goes in search of the Lord with the frantic fervour of an importunate lover who dashes off, breaking all norms of feminine conduct, disfigures herself and musters public opinion for the acceleration of her union with her beloved.

(ii) Periyāḻvār searched for the Lord in the milk ocean; Tirumaṅkai Āḻvār went roving round Tiruvēṅkaṭam, the Hill station and other pilgrim centres down below, playing the role of the importunate lover, referred to in (i) above. And here, Nammāḻvār is inclined to think that the wind is also a kindred soul, exhibiting a similar behaviour.

ūḻitōṟu ūḻi ulakukku nīrkoṇṭu,
tōḻiyarum yāmum pōl, nīrāy nekiḻkiṉṟa
vāḻiya, vāṉamē! nīyum matucūtaṉ
pāḻimaiyil paṭṭu, avaṉkaṇ pācattāl naivāyē? (II–1–5)

Translation

Ye clouds, into tears you break for ever
And flood the worlds; do you in sorrow dwindle
Like me and my comrades, under the spell irresistible
Of Matucūtaṉ, coveting Him heart and soul?
May you from misery be free and prosper!

Notes

(i) It is clear from this, that Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī and comrades of her ilk are grief-stricken to such an extent that their profuse tears flood the worlds like the rain-water unleashed by the clouds.

(ii) Matucūtaṉ (Madhusūdha)-Lord Mahā Viṣṇu, Who slew Madhu, the demon. The Āḻvār queries whether the clouds did also come under the spell of the Lord, attracted by His glorious trait of vanquishing the evil forces, in the same way as he and others of his ilk did.

naivāya emmēpōl, nāḷ matiyē! nī in nāḷ
mai vāṉ iruḷ akaṟṟāy; māḻāntu tēmputiyāl;
ai vāy aravu-aṇaimēl āḻip perumāṉār
mey vācakam kēṭṭu, uṉ meynnirmai tōṟṟāyē? (II–1–6)

Translation

Worn out like us, you withering Moon!
These days, the dark sky you don't illumine;
You have, it seems, lost your erstwhile sheen,
Misled by the utterance of the Lord who the discus holds,
Reclining on the serpent with its five hoods.

Notes

(i) The Moon waxes and wanes because of its different phases, but Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī attributes the waning of the Moon and the resultant diminution of its brightness to a mental malady, on a par with her own.

(ii) In her present state of mental depression, the Nāyakī is so sore with the Lord that she says that the Lord's utterances should not be taken at their face value. No doubt, Śrī Rāma averred that his tongue shall never lie. Unfortunately, however, the Āḻvār reproaches the Lord as being double-tongued like the serpent on which He reclines. The serpent has a double-forked tongue in each of its hoods and here is a serpent with five hoods. And then, it was with His discus that the Lord covered the Sun and converted day into the illusory night; thus, the discus was a pawn in the game, an accomplice of the Lord for carrying out the strategy. If, as Śrī Rāma, the Lord scrupulously adhered to truth, as Śrī Kṛṣṇa, He would not mind swerving from it, if thereby He could do a good turn to His devotees. It could not, therefore, be said that the Lord was guilty of falsehood, merely

sticking to the letter with academic zeal, without going into the spirit behind His actions. The Lord is beneficial to His devotees both ways, by adhering to the truth, as Śrī Rāma did, and swerving from it, as Śrī Kṛṣṇa did. Nampiḷḷai observed: "We seek shelter alike in Rāma's truthfulness and Kṛṣṇa's diplomacy (seeming falsehoods).

tōṟṟōm maṭa neñcam em perumāṉ nāraṇaṟku; em
āṟṟāmai colli aḻuvōmai, nī naṭuvē
vēṟṟōr vakaiyil koṭitāy, eṉai ūḻi
māṟṟāṉmai niṟṟiyō? vāḻi! kaṉai iruḷē! (II–1–7)

Translation

We have unto Nāraṇaṉ, Our Lord
Lost our hearts and we did our sorrows lament
In each other's company but step in you did,
Worse than our foes you are, you darksome night!
May you prosper and from this state be rid.

Notes

(i) This stanza, as worded above, does not accord with the pattern of the preceding and succeeding stanzas in this decad. Based, however, on the diction as such, Emperumāṉar (Rāmānuja) and other Ācāryas were inclined to interpret this song, as follows: The dark night, instead of weeping along with Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī and her comrades, is worse than a foe, in so far as it prevents their seeing each other and bemoaning their common lot of separation from the Lord.

(ii) There is, however, another method of interpreting this stanza, so as to bring it on a piece with the rest. Not knowing that darkness is an inherent quality of the night, Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī sympathises with it and exclaims, "We are already weighed down by our own calamity and here you are, exhibiting your own dire distress of darkness and adding to our miseries. May you soon be rid of this state and prosper!"

iruḷin tiṇi vaṇṇam mā nīrk kaḻiyē! pōy
maruḷuṟṟu irāppakal tuñcilum nī tuñcāyāl;
uruḷum cakaṭam utaitta perumāṉār
aruḷin peru nacaiyāl āḻāntu nontāyē? (II–1–8)

Translation

You channel, the dark waters in abundance
You discharge, day and night, bewildered;
Do you also pine, with deep desire, for the grace
Of the Lord who the (demon in the) rolling wheel shattered?

Note

Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī gropes her way through, in darkness, and not being able to distinguish land from water, comes to a channel discharging lots of water and making plenty of noise in the process. She thinks that the channel is also lamenting its separation from Lord Kṛṣṇa, who destroyed Śakaṭāsura and whose grace it pines for.

nontu ārāk kātal-nōy mel āvi uḷ ulartta-
nantā viḷakkamē! nīyum aḷiyattāy!
centāmarait taṭaṅ kaṇ, ceṅkaṉi vāy em perumāṉ
am tāmam taṉ-tuḷāy ācaiyāl vēvāyē? (II–1–9)

Translation

You undying flame, sad indeed is your plight.
Your gentle soul stands withered; burnt are you
By the desire to get the tulacī garland, cool and bright,
Worn by our Lord with large lotus-eyes and lips of red hue?

Notes

(i) Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī returns home in a state of mental exhaustion, and sees the burning lamp. The heat of the flame, she thinks, is the one generated by its separation from the Lord, an experience identical with hers.

(ii) The flame of the lamp is not homogeneous, being of different intensity of heat at different places or zones, as they

are called; the flame itself comes up anew every moment, a fact which can be gathered only by inference. It is an optical illusion that the flame appears to be single, instead of an unbroken succession of different flames. Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī goes by what she sees and calls it an undying flame.

vēvu ārā vēṭkai nōy mel āvi uḷ ulartta
ōvātu irāppakal uṉpālē viḻttu oḻintāy;
mā vāy piḷantu, marutiṭai pōy, maṇ aḷanta
mūvā mutalvā! iṉi emmaic cōrēlē. (II–1–10)

Translation

Primate of perennial youth, the horse's (Kēci, the demons) big mouth you split,
' Tween the twin trees you crawled and broke them down,
The worlds you measured; in you engrossed, day and night,
Our tender souls, with blistering malady of love struck down,
Have badly dried up, pray, henceforth leave us not.

Note

Seeing the Āḻvār's pangs of separation from Him, the Lord approaches the Āḻvār, shedding His cool grace. Thereupon, the Lord is told by the Āḻvār that his tender soul, already worn out and emaciated due to its separation from the Lord, thaws down still further in contemplation of His wondrous deeds and glorious traits. The Āḻvār also fervently prays to the Lord, not to forsake him any more.

cōrāta ep poruṭkum ātiyām cōtikkē
ārāta kātal kurukūrc caṭakōpaṉ
ōrāyiram coṉṉa avaṟṟuḷ ivai pattum
cōrār, viṭār kaṇṭīr vaikuntam tiṇṇaṉavē. (II–1–11)

Translation

Those that are regular in reciting these stanzas ten,
Out of the thousand composed by Kurukūr Caṭakōpaṉ,

Of love insatiable for the resplendent Lord, the root cause
Of one and all, shall surely enjoy for ever, Heavenly bliss.

Notes

(i) It is only after the Lord came and joined the Āḷvār that He became God indeed, the Protector of one and all, *without any exception*; again, the Lord became resplendent, only after His union with the Āḷvār.

(ii) It is also noteworthy that, In this decad, the Āḷvār has come to be identified through his boundless love for the Lord; that is why he is referred to not as mere Kurukūr Caṭakōpaṉ but as Caṭakōpaṉ of insatiable God-love.

Second Centum—Second Decad (II-2)
(Tiṉṉaṉ vīṭu)

Preamble

In the last decad, the Āḷvār was confined to the bottom-most depth of dejection and his yearning for the Lord baffled description. It was but meet that the Lord came and presented Himself before such an ardent devotee and saved him from collapsing altogether. It goes without saying that, when the Āḷvār came, face to face, with the Lord, all his erstwhile dejection and the resultant fatigue vanished altogether. The Āḷvār then made up his mind not to allow himself to be swept off once again, by contemplating the Lord's trait of 'Saulabhya' (easy accessibility). He would rather tackle the other plank, safe and steady, namely, the Lord's overlordship and transcendent glory and sustain himself.

No doubt, in the opening decad of the first centum also, the Āḷvār spoke about the Lord's Supremacy and transcendent glory. But that was in a different key altogether. There it was direct postulation, as such, running parallel to the Vedic texts. Here, the Āḷvār establishes the Lord's Supremacy through an elimination of the claims of the possible contenders for this position of Super-eminence, citing the relevant anecdotes from the 'Itihāsas' and 'Purāṇas.' There it was confined solely to the 'Para' or transcendent state of the Lord in the High Heavens whereas here, the

Supremacy of the Lord is brought out in His 'Vibhava' or incarnate state. Speaking about the Avatāras (Incarnations), the Lord's wondrous deeds can bear endless repetitions, without satiety. Every time the same trait or deed is repeated, there is a freshness about it, with a new aroma.

tiṉṉaṉ vīṭu mutal muḻutum āy,
eṇṇiṉ mīṭiyaṉ, em perumāṉ,
maṇṇum viṇṇum ellām uṭaṉ uṇṭa nam
kaṇṇaṉ kaṇ allatu illai ōr kaṇṇē. (II–2–1)

Translation

There is no God other than my Sire, Kaṇṇaṉ,
(Whose traits and possessions) defy enumeration,
The granter of 'Mokṣa', the supreme bliss firm and fine,
Who at once ate up all the worlds, for their sustentation.

Note

The Āḷvār affirms that Lord Kṛṣṇa who enthralled him by His innumerable auspicious traits, is the Supreme Lord of the whole Universe, the granter of Mokṣa, the final bliss. During the period of deluge, He did sustain all the worlds by keeping them within His stomach and this is referred to here, as His having eaten them up. This 'eating up' actually connotes that the Lord sustains the worlds and their contents within His stomach with the same relish as one has for food. The minor deities, Brahmā, Rudra and others, are also among those, so sustained by the Lord. Need it be specifically said that the one who sustains is superior to those sustained?

ē pāvam! paramē! ēḻ ulakum
ī pāvam ceytu aruḷāl aḻippār ār–
mā pāvam viṭa, araṟkup piccai pey
kōpāla kōlariēṟu aṉṟiyē? (II–2–2)

Translation

Who but Kōpālaṉ, the mighty Lion,
Who unto Araṉ gave alms and from heinous sin

Redeemed, can the seven worlds graciously sustain,
Ridding them of all sins? What a pity, none can
Describe His glory, well beyond enumeration!

Notes

(i) In the preceding stanza, the Āḻvār averred that there is none superior to Kōpālaṉ (Lord Kṛṣṇa). When some persons questioned the propriety of such an assertion in the face of the Vedic texts glorifying Brahmā, Rudra and other Celestials, the Āḻvār turned round and said: "Well, you had better examine the record of performance of each of them and judge for yourselves. When they all got into trouble, each in his own way, they all sought asylum in Lord Maha Viṣṇu. Could there still be any misgiving about His supremacy over all the rest?"

(ii) The Āḻvār feels very much vexed that, in the midst of his God-enjoyment, he should have to leave the track and tackle these deluded enquirers, wasting much precious time in explaining the much-too-obvious, the difference between a priceless gem and poor clay.

(iii) The ill-effects of the sins committed by us, in a trice, can hardly be liquidated even after the sufferings of ages and yet it is the Lord's redemptive grace that grinds them to a halt.

ēṟaṉai pūvaṉai, pūmakaḷ-taṉṉai,
vēṟuiṉṟi viṇ toḻat taṉṉuḷ vaittu,
mēl-taṉṉai mītiṭa nimirntu,
maṇ-koṇṭa, māl-taṉiṉ mikkum ōr tēvum uḷatē? (II–2–3)

Translation

Could there be a God greater than Tirumāl, our Lord,
Who has on His person lodged Ēraṉ (Rudra) and Pūvaṉ Brahmā

Besides Pūmakaḷ (Lakṣmī, the lotus-born), whom the Devas
Worship, who upwards grew and measured all the worlds?

Notes

(i) See notes below I-3-9 regarding the positions taken up by the exalted Rudra and Brahmā, on the Lord's person.

The Celestials adore the Lord's condescending grace in accommodating, on His broad person, besides Śrī Mahālakṣmī, Rudra and Brahmā.

(ii) As Tṛvikrama, He encompassed all the worlds.

These are convincing proofs of His supremacy over all the rest.

tēvum epporuḷum paṭaikkap pūvil nāṉmukaṉaip paṭaitta
tēvaṉ em perumāṉukku allāl, pūvum pūcaṉaiyum takumē? (II–2–4)

Translation

Can one worship and with flowers decorate
Any one other than 'Emperumāṉ' (our Supreme Lord)
Who, the lotus-based, four-headed Brahmā, ushered,
The Devas and the rest to create?

Notes

(i) Worship can be offered only to the Supreme Lord and being of exquisite charm, He alone is worthy of decoration.

(ii) Here is an interesting anecdote:

Prior to his absorption into the Vaiṣṇavite fold, Empār, the illustrious Preceptor (a cousin of Śrī Rāmānuja) was, for some time, serving in the Śivā temple at Kāḷahasti, under the appellation of "Uḷḷaṅkai Koṇarnta Nāyaṉār". One day, when he stood perched on a tree, gathering flowers for the diurnal worship of the Deity, right underneath, Śrī Tirumalai Nampi, his uncle, was discoursing on this particular stanza to his disciples. The votary, high up on the tree, burst out with an emphatic 'NO', in reply to the question put in this stanza, jumped down, tore off his Rudrākṣa necklace

(worn by the votaries of Rudra and fell at the feet of the learned discourser, seeking refuge in him.

takum cīrt taṉ taṉi mutaliṉuḷḷē
mikum tēvum ep poruḷum paṭaikkat
takum kōlat tāmaraik kaṇṇaṉ, emmāṉ
mikum cōti mēl aṟivār evarē? (II–2–5)

Translation

Does one Know of any other, more radiant
Than our lovely lotus-eyed Lord, omniscient and omnipotent,
Who, by His resolve unique, could bring into being
The Devas, (men) and all other things?

Note

One of the fundamental characteristics of the Supreme Lord is 'Puṇḍarīkākṣatva' (i.e.) His being lotus-eyed. These tell-tale eyes will straightaway proclaim His supremacy. Enthralled by His bewitching looks, the Āḻvār swears that He is the Supreme Lord. c.f. Śloka 12 of the hymnal gems of Yāmuna, where

He queries:

"Who but Śrīman Nārāyaṇa is the red lotus-eyed?
Who but He is Puruṣottama, the highest?

evarum yāvaiyum ellāp poruḷum
kavarvu iṉṟit taṉṉuḷ oṭuṅka niṉṟa
pavar koḷ ñāṉa-veḷḷac cuṭar mūrtti-
avar em āḻi am paḷḷiyārē. (II–2–6)

Translation

He Who, in His stomach, holds with ease,
The sentient beings, the non-sentient things and all these,
Is the lovely Lord, of Knowledge immense;
Dear to me, He of exquisite form lies on the *watery expanse*.

Note

This may refer either to the Lord reclining on the milk-ocean or on the watery expanse, during the deluge.

paḷḷi ālilai ēḻ ulakum koḷḷum
vaḷḷal val vayiṟṟup perumāṉ
uḷuḷ ār aṟivār-avaṉ-taṉ
kaḷḷa māya maṉakkaruttē? (II–2–7)

Translation

Who indeed can plumb the unfathomable mind
Of the Lord Supreme who could hold the worlds seven
In His stomach, big and tough,
And repose on a tender fig- leaf?

Note

Only the Supreme Lord is capable of achieving the seemingly impossible, blending within Himself the incompatibles, such as holding inside His stomach all the worlds and lying as a tender babe on a fig- leaf floating on the watery expanse. None can indeed probe His mysteries and comprehend them. It can only be said that nothing is beyond Him and there lies the clue to His supremacy.

karuttil tēvum ellāp poruḷum
varuttitta māyap pirāṉ aṉṟi, yārē-
tiruttit tiṉ nilai mūvulakum tammuḷ
iruttik kākkum iyalviṉarē? (II–2–8)

Translation

None but Māyappirāṉ (the Benefactor great of mysterious prowess)
Can by a mere resolve create Devas and all else.
Who else can His natural affinity possess
To preserve by sheer will all the three worlds?

Note

This cuts across the popular notion that Brahmā is the functional Deity for creation and Viṣṇu, the Deity for sustentation. Actually, Mahā Viṣṇu controls all the three functions of creation, preservation and dissolution, and Brahmā and Rudra are mere functionaries on His behalf.

kākkum iyalviṉaṉ kaṇṇa-perumāṉ
cērkkai ceytu, taṉ untiyuḷḷē
vāytta ticaimukaṉ intiraṉ vāṉavar
ākkiṉāṉ, teyva ulakukaḷē. (II-2- 9)

Translation

Lord Kaṇṇaṉ Whose nature it is to protect,
Did (at the time of dissolution) collect
All the worlds into His navel and then create
Ticaimukaṉ (Brahmā), Intiraṉ and Vāṉavar (Devas) and their worlds (holy and bright).

Notes

(i) Lord Kṛṣṇa is Supreme, because He controls all the three functions of creation, sustentation and dissolution. It was to dispel the undesirable gloom and grant the coveted felicities that the Lord incarnated as Śrī Kṛṣṇa.

(ii) At the time of dissolution, one and all, without any exception, get inside Him. This is then followed by re-creation of the worlds and that way, the cyclic process goes on, epoch after epoch.

kaḷvā! emmaiyum ēḻ ulakum niṉ-
uḷḷē tōṟṟiya iṟaiva! eṉṟu,
veḷ-ēṟaṉ nāṉmukaṉ intiraṉ vāṉavar
puḷ-ūrti kaḻal paṇintu, ēttuvarē. (II-2-10)

Translation

Veḷḷēṟaṉ (Rudra), Nāṉmukaṉ (Brahmā), Indra and Vāṉavar (Devas) congregate
And worship at the feet of the Lord with that bird (Garuḍa) as His mount
And unto Him, pray 'Iṟaiva' (by your resolve), you brought out
The seven worlds and us all and yet you will hide out,
Like a thief, your greatness and to us for favours resort".

Notes

(i) The Celestials, including Rudra, with the white bull as his mount, the four-headed Brahmā, Indra and others of that exalted band, seek various boons from Mahā Viṣṇu, the Supreme Lord, and their power to grant, in turn, the wishes of their votaries is thus derived from Him alone. And yet, they wish to tickle their vanity by making it appear that even the Supreme Lord seeks favour from them. It is noteworthy, Lord Kṛṣṇa just tickled the vanity of Rudra when He sought from the latter that He be blessed with a son through His consort, Rukmiṇī. It is for this that the Lord has been referred to, in this stanza, as a thief.

(ii) Divya Kavi (The poet, *par excellence*), Piḷḷai Perumāḷ Ayyangār exclaims: "Oh, Lord, what a paradox that you, from whom all things emanate, are dubbed a thief for having stolen butter! Actually, we are the thieves, who think and act as if we are our own, not realising that we belong to you, the rightful owner".

ētta ēḻ ulakum koṇṭa kōlak
kūttaṉaik kurukūrc caṭakōpaṉ col
vāytta āyirattuḷ ivai pattuṭaṉ
ētta vallavarkku illai ōr ūṉamē. (II-2-11)

Translation

For those who learn and laud these songs ten,
Out of the thousand bequeathed unto us, by Kurukūr Caṭakōpaṉ,
In adoration of the enchanting Lord, who did span
With ease, the worlds seven, drawbacks there will be none.

Notes

(i) Those, who learn these ten songs and enter into their spirit will be firm in their conviction that Mahā Viṣṇu is the Supreme Lord; they will thus be free from the drawbacks of (i) not looking upon Mahā Viṣṇu as the Supreme Lord and (ii) looking upon Deities other than Mahā Viṣṇu, as Supreme. For the matter of that, the

solitary episode of Trivikrama, of charming beauty, measuring effortlessly all the worlds in just three strides, is enough to assert Mahā Viṣṇu's Supremacy.

(ii) The Lord's Supremacy has been set out, in this decad, under various counts, namely, destruction of the sins of devotees and ridding them of distress, being lotus-eyed, friend-in-need, achieving the impossible and blending the incompatibles, laudation by the exalted celestials, Rudra, Brahmā and others, control of all the three functions of creation, sustentation and dissolution and so on.

Second Centum—Third Decad (II-3)
(Ūṉil vāḻ uyirē)

Preamble

In the first decad of this centum, we saw the Āḻvār in dire distress. Towards the end, the Lord, however, deigned to present Himself and once again, the Āḻvār is in rapturous rapport with the Lord. In this decad, he gives vent to the joy of reunion with the enchanting Lord. In strict sequence, this should have been the second decad instead of being the third. The Āḻvār's immediate reaction, on seeing the Lord come back to him, was, however, that one of such super eminence, the overlord of the Celestials, should have at all deigned to mingle with one so low. And, therefore, he straightaway expatiated on the Lord's transcendental glory, in the second decad.

ūṉil vāḻ uyirē! nallai, po! uṉṉaip peṟṟu,
vāṉuḷār perumāṉ, matucūtaṉ, eṉ ammāṉ,
tāṉum yāṉum ellām taṉṉuḷḷē kalantoḻintōm:
tēṉum pālum neyyum kaṉṉalum amutum ottē. (II–3–1)

Translation

Oh, ye mind, dwelling in the fleshy body,
You are indeed good; because of you, It (this vassal)

Could with Matucūtaṉ, my Lord, mingle, chief of Celestials
And into Him dissolve like honey, milk, nectar and candy.

Notes

(i) In this decad, where the Āḻvār gives vent to his joy of communion with the Lord, the one he was pining for, praise is first bestowed on his forward mind which had overtaken him in its flight to God, seeking the bliss of union with Him. This is like a prince, restored back to his lost kingdom by some one, thanking that person first. The word 'Uyir' (soul) in the original text, by implication, refers to the mind, the principal adjunct, stirring up one's thoughts either way.

(ii) The last line refers to the blend of all that is delicious and it can either be an admixture of all these delicacies or the mixture of like things only, (i.e.) honey with honey, milk with milk, nectar with nectar and so on.

ottār mikkārai ilaiyāya mā māya!
ottāy eṉ poruṭkum, uyir āy, eṉṉaip peṟṟa
at tāy āy, tantai āy, aṟiyātaṉa aṟivittu,
attā! nī ceytaṉa aṭiyēṉ aṟiyēṉē. (II–3–2)

Translation

There's none above you, Oh, Lord of wondrous traits!
And none equal to you, and yet forms you'd take
Like all others; you are the life-giver
To one and all, the Mother that yielded me, the Father
And Preceptor, 'tis beyond me to list out all your favours.

Notes

(i) While patting on the back of his forward mind, in the preceding song, the Āḻvār realised that even such an evolved mind was but the Lord's gift and, therefore, he passed on to sing the glory of God.

(ii) When this song was discoursed upon, by that great preceptor, Empār, the question was raised by some one in the learned assembly as to who is the first spiritual

preceptor for every Individual. Some said, "The Guru who imparts the requisite spiritual knowledge", while some others observed "It is the Śrī Vaiṣṇava who puts us on to the spiritual preceptor for acceptance". Empār, however, clarified: "Indeed, the Lord, seated in the region of our heart, is the first Preceptor, hidden and unseen though, for it is He who, from His vantage position inside us, granted us the impulse not to resist but to yield to the good offices of the visible preceptors outside and of the helpers who put us on to such preceptors.

aṟiyāk kālattuḷḷē aṭimaikkaṇ aṉpu ceyvittu,
aṟiyā mā māyattu aṭiyēṉai vaittāyāl;
aṟiyāmaik kuṟaḷ āy, nilam māvali mūvaṭi eṉṟu
aṟiyāmai vañcittāy, eṉatu āviyuḷ kalantē. (II–3–3)

Translation

Wonderful 'tis, you got into my mind,
And in me, in (the clutches of) this mystic land,
Still immature, did instil the desire to serve you around,
Even as you did on the sly, obtain the land
Of three strides from Māvali (Mahābali), as Vāmaṉa, the little lad.

Note

The present versification conforms to the interpretation given by Śrī Rāmānuja, duly changing the prose order of the text, as in the original, quite in keeping with the current milieu. Śrī Rāmānuja was taught the meaning of this song by his spiritual Instructor (Tirumālai Āṇṭāṉ), as follows, without any change in the prose order of the poem (as in the original text).

"You instilled in me the desire to serve you at a time when I was hardly evolved and yet, you have kept me wallowing in worldly life, the hot-bed for ignorance, instead of promoting my God-love and providing the necessary incentives therefor".

Śrī Rāmānuja had, however, no hesitation in pointing out to the learned Instructor that, put that way, it would be a reproach against the Lord and would, therefore, be a misfit in this decad, where the Āḻvār gives vent to the joy of Union with the Lord and sings His glory.

eṉatu āviyuḷ kalanta peru nal utavik kaimmāṟu
eṉatu āvi tantoḻintēṉ; iṉi miḷvatu eṉpatu uṇṭē?
eṉatu āvi āviyum nī, poḻil eḻum uṇṭa entāy!
eṉatu āvi yār? yāṉ ār? tanta nī koṇṭākkiṉaiyē. (II–3–4)

Translation

My Sire, Who did in your stomach sustain
The worlds seven, you dissolved into my soul;
For this great good, my soul I offer you, in return,
There isn't any going back; but what is my soul?
Who am I? what is yours indeed, you have taken,
You are the Giver great, the Soul of my soul.

Notes

For all the good done to him by the Lord, the Āḻvār wanted to recompense Him and so, he offered his soul to the Lord, adding, with extra gusto, that it was a firm offer from which he would not recant. A little introspection, however, made him realise that there is hardly anything which does not belong to God and there is, therefore, no question of surrendering the soul to the Lord to whom it rightly belongs. What is it that is being surrendered and whose was it before the surrender? To surrender to the Lord that which already belongs to Him would be tantamount to the assumption of an ill-conceived right of ownership of the thing surrendered, in derogation of the divine right of ownership.

These very sentiments were echoed by Saint Yāmuna in ślokas 52 and 53 of 'Stotra Ratna' (hymnal gems). Well, the dilemma in which Saint Nammāḻvār and Saint Yāmunācārya were caught up, is bound to present itself to every one of us, as long as we live in this abode. Scared by the horrors of earthly existence, one is tempted to surrender one's soul to the Lord, as if it is one's own and could be

bartered away in this manner, and then the correction follows, based on the realisation of one's essential nature and the inter-relationship between Man and God. Surrendering oneself unto the keeping of the Lord, with the full awareness and awakening of one's essential nature (svarūpa), as the Lord's own, solely dependent on Him, stands, however, on a different footing.

iṉi yār ñāṉaṅkaḷāl eṭukkal eḷāta entāy!
kaṉivār vīṭṭu-iṉpamē! eṉ kaṭal-paṭā amutē!
taṉiyēṉ vāḻ-mutalē! poḻil ēḻum ēṉam oṉṟāy
nuṉi ār kōṭṭil vaittāy! nuṉa pātam cērntēṉē. (II–3–5)

Translation

My Lord, mere learning, however profound, Can't comprehend Thee,
Unto your lovers you are the fountain of heavenly bliss;
You are my nectar, not that stuff from the Saltish sea,
But the very source of life for this lover peerless;
On your pointed tusk, you lifted the worlds seven,
As the Boar unique and so have I your feet now attained.

Note

The Āḻvār rejoices that he has been reclaimed by the Lord from the Ocean of Samsāra, even as He reclaimed the Earth from under the Oceanic waters, after slaying Hiraṇyākṣa, the golden-eyed demon.

cērntār tīviṉaikaṭku aru nañcai, tiṇ matiyai,
tīrntār-tam maṉattup piriyātu avar uyiraic
cōrntē pukalkoṭāc cuṭarai, arakkiyai mūkku
īrntāyai, aṭiyēṉ aṭaintēṉ, mutal muṉṉamē. (II–3–6)

Translation

Unto your devotees, you vouchsafe a mind steady and bright,
Never apart from the devout, you are their very life and beacon light,

A deadly poison for their sins, the devil's (Sūrpaṇakhā's) nose you smote,
From the earliest time this vassal is at your feet.

Notes

(i) The Āḻvār affirms that he always belonged to the Lord and rejoices, now that he is in the Lord's company, forgetting all the pangs of the earlier separation.

(ii) It is said that one has to inevitably pass through the reactions of one's past actions. But this is true only in the case of those who are not devoted to the Supreme Lord, while, in respect of the devout, He operates as a deadly poison, destroying all their sins.

(iii) Steadfastness of mind is indeed one of His great gifts. Here is a nice illustration.

When king Ambaṟṣa was doing *Tapas*, in devout contemplation of Lord Mahā Viṣṇu, the Lord appeared before him, disguised as Indra and insisted that the King should ask of him boons. As Indra was not the Deity the King was meditating upon, the latter resented the former's intrusion and requested him to get away, his exalted position notwithstanding

(iv) When a lustrous gem is reclaimed from the slush into which it had got sunk for long, it shines again as before, as this sheen is nothing new and the lustre always belonged to it. Similar is the case with the Āḻvār who always belonged to the Lord, but stands reclaimed only now.

muṉ nal yāḻ payil nūl narampiṉ mutir cuvaiyē!
pal-nalār payilum paraṉē! pavittiraṉē!
kaṉṉalē! amutē! kār mukilē! eṉ kaṇṇā!
niṉ alāl ilēṉkāṇ; eṉṉai nī kuṟikkoḷḷē. (II–3–7)

Translation

You are the delectable melody, chaste and matured,
From the ancient lyre, and by the eminent adored;

Oh, Lord! pure and Supreme, sweet like nectar and cane juice
My cloud-hued Kaṇṇā! I do seek refuge
In none but you, take note and make me yours.

Notes

(i) Notwithstanding the assertion, as in the last song, that he belonged to the Lord from time immemorial, the Āḻvār apprehends the frightful possibility of getting separated from the Lord, over again, and he, therefore, entreats Him to note that he cannot brook separation from Him Who is sweetness itself. The sweetness of music which attracts the cow, the infant and the snake alike, is proverbial, and the Lord is the very source of this sweetness.

(ii) That the Lord is pure needs no special mention but what is emphasised here is that He purifies worldlings like us and makes us fit to join the rank and file of the pure souls in the yonder Heavens.

kuṟikkoḷ ñāṉaṅkaḷāl eṉai ūḻi cey tavamum
kiṟikkoṇṭu, ip piṟappē cila nāḷil eytiṉaṉ yāṉ–
uṟikkoṇṭa veṇṇey pāl oḷittu uṇṇum ammāṉ piṉ
neṟikkoṇṭa neñcaṉāyp piṟavit tuyar kaṭintē. (II–3–8)

Translation

Right in this birth and in a short space
Have I attained what others achieve down the ages
Through deep penance and Knowledge intense,
Freed from the miseries of birth, all by the grace
Of my Lord, who stole and ate from hanging hoops
Milk and butter, with my mind unto Him very close.

Note

The Āḻvār could attain the Lord right now, not by following the disciplines, rigid and rigorous, but solely by His Grace which alighted on him while contemplating the boyish pranks of the Lord, as Śrī Kṛṣṇa, eating stealthily, the milk and butter, stored up in hanging hoops, in the pastoral village of Gokula.

kaṭi vār taṇ am tuḻayk kaṇṇaṉ, viṇṇavar perumāṉ,
paṭi vāṉam iṟanta paramaṉ, pavittiraṉ cīr,
ceṭi ār nōykaḷ keṭa, paṭintu kuṭaintu āṭi,
aṭiyēṉ vāymaṭuttup parukik kaḷittēṉē. (II–3–9)

Translation

Sporting the Cool tulacī garland, full of fragrance,
Kaṇṇaṉ, Chief of Celestials, has no equal,
Even in heaven; unto Him, pure and supreme, this vassal
Could come close and get rid of sins, vast and dense,
Revelling and singing profusely His traits auspicious.

Note

The Āḻvār rejoices that he could partake of the heavenly bliss even here, as the Lord is right with him in all His celestial grandeur, the dense sins which stood between him and the Lord having been eradicated, root and branch, by His grace. It is a case of the immaculate Lord purifying one and all falling within the purview of His sweet, spontaneous grace.

kaḻippum kavarvum aṟṟu, piṟappup piṇi mūppu iṟappu aṟṟu,
oḷikkoṇṭa cōtiyumāy uṭaṉkūṭuvatu eṉṟu kolō–
tuḷikkiṉṟa vāṉ, in nilam-cuṭar-āḻi caṅku ēnti–
aḷikkiṉṟa māyap pirāṉ aṭiyārkaḷ kuḻāṅkaḷaiyē? (II–3–10)

Translation

Oh, when shall I enter and enjoy the holy gatherings
Of devotees of the wondrous Lord, holding the conch and discus radiant,
Protector of Heaven and Earth, the light that all knowledge illumines,
Getting rid of pleasures worldly and the resultant sufferings,
Birth and death, old age and pestilence?

Note

In the preceding song, the Āḻvār gave vent to his supreme joy, exclaiming that the very heavenly bliss had come to him, right here.

The Lord asked the Āḻvār whether there was anything more He could do for him. The Āḻvar replied:

"My Lord, there is no doubt that I have found Heaven on Earth. But then, the fear whether the present enjoyment can go on for all time without interruption, haunts me situated as I am, in this material body, with all the ailments flesh is heir to, surrounded by the material world, swayed by the wayward senses. And, therefore, this body should go and the scene shifted to the uncontaminated High Heavens where I could enjoy the holy company of the 'Nityas' (ever-free angels) and the 'Muktas' (the released souls)".

kuḻām koḷ pēr arakkaṉ kulam vīya muṉintavaṉai
kuḻām koḷ teṉ kurukūrc caṭakōpaṉ terintu uraitta
kuḻām koḷ āyirattuḷ ivai pattum uṭaṉ pāṭi,
kuḻāṅkaḷāy, aṭiyīr! uṭaṉkūṭiniṉṟu āṭumiṉē. (II–3–11)

Translation

Dance, ye devotees! in a body, singing diligently, these songs ten,
Out of the cluster of thousand learned songs of Caṭakōpaṉ,
Chief of the apostles of Ten Kurukūr, in adoration
Of the irate Lord, who routed the demon (Rāvaṇa) and his battalions.

Note

In this end-stanza, there is a departure from the usual pattern of setting out the benefits of learning and singing the ten songs in each decad. The Āḻvār emphasises the importance of these ten songs being sung in a chorus by the devotees, as an end in itself. It may also be construed that those who learn these ten songs will have the felicity of singing them in the holy company of devotees, unlike the Āḻvār, who languished for want of such an association. It is worth repeating here the following exhortation of Nampiḷḷai, the great Preceptor:

"Until you reach the Eternal Land, the few of you who are devoted to the Supreme Lord, should, during the few days of your stay in this abode, sink all petty differences, based on lust and lucre, and sing, in one voice, the Lord's glory, for your common enjoyment and edification".

Second Centum—Fourth Decad (II-4)
(Āṭi āṭi)

In the penultimate song of the last decad the Āḻvār expressed his desire to sing profusely the glory of the Lord in a chorus. Looking around, he, however, found the prospect of mustering persons from the rank and file of the worldlings for this purpose pretty bleak. He had, therefore, no option but to shift the venue of his enjoyment to the high Heavens and sing the Lord's praise in the company of the 'Nitya Sūris' there. This ardent longing of the Āḻvār was, however, not realised there and then and once again the Āḻvār was thrown into deep dejection assuming the overtones of a frustrated feminine lover in a state of despondency. The Āḻvār had got into such a state on two earlier occasions, namely I-4 and II-1. On the first occasion he sent some birds as his emissaries to the Lord, while, on the second occasion, all things around seemed to suffer, like him, the pangs of separation from the Lord and he, therefore, wept along with those comrades-in-distress. But now his grief is so deep and poignant that all that is said in this decad is put in the mouth of the mother who questions the Lord how He could reduce her love-intoxicated daughter to such a parlous state and asks Him to clarify His intentions as to what exactly He proposes to do about the poor little victim.

No doubt, it is the Āḻvār who sings, and yet, this assumes the form of a mother's dialogue with the Lord indicating an extremely critical state so far as the Āḻvār is concerned. This is like the swollen river Kāverī or Gaṅgā branching off into rivulets, going by different names but carrying the same water as in Kāvērī or Gaṅgā. The necessity for the mother's intervention here, in this decad, unlike the two earlier decads referred to above can be understood if we probe into the genesis of each of these three decads. It is a matter of common knowledge that the grief over the loss of a thing varies in direct proportion to the value one attaches to the

thing lost. Fo, example, as between the loss of a silver piece and a gold piece, the latter causes a far more grievous feeling of privation. If the same person, later on, lost a necklace set with costly gems and rubies it would be the worst blow. And now let us analyse the cause of the Āḻvār's grief at the commencement of each of the two earlier decads. In I-3-10 the Āḻvār wanted to adore and embrace the Lord's pair of feet which spanned the entire Universe during His Avatār as Trivikrama. But he couldn't get at those feet and, in the grief that ensued, he sent the birds on an errand to the Lord as in I-4. Again, in I-10-9, the Āḻvār devoutly longed for communion with the Lord in His Iconic form in the pilgrim centre, Tirukkuruṅkuṭi (deep south in Tamiḻ Nādu). Non-materialisation of this ardent desire brought on grief far more intense than on the earlier occasion in view of the relatively greater importance of the thing now lost, namely, communion with the Lord in His Iconic manifestation, a veritable ocean of innumerable excellances vis-a-vis His Incarnate form which is like the river, once in spate, now turned dry or turgid. And now what is the position? In II-3-10 the Āḻvār pined for entry into the gatherings of the devotees and singing profusely the glory of the Lord in their steadfast company. But this did not happen immediately, and naturally, the loss is the worst so far on the analogy of the successive loss of silver, Gold and gem-studded necklace. So great is the importance attached to the company of the Godly. This accounts for the induction of the mother into the scene.

It might be questioned why this decad complains at the door of the Lord instead of being couched as an appeal to the band of the devotees on the Yonder side, whose company the Āḻvār pines for but could not have. Well, the complaint was always lodged with the King, the aggrieved party rushing to the Palace gate even though the gems and rubies were looted by robbers in the jungle. As a matter of fact it is only the Lord who grants us all felicities including participation in the gatherings of the Godly and hence, the appeal at His door.

āṭi āṭi akam karaintu, icai
pāṭip pāṭik kaṇṇīr malki, eṅkum
nāṭi nāṭi, naraciṅkā! eṉṟu
vāṭi vāṭum iv vāḷ-nutalē. (II–4–1)

Translation

This young dame of forehead bright,
Keeps rattling, with a mind worn out;
Looking out all over she sings and sings,
Cries out, " Oh, Naraciṅkā!" and sinks.

Notes

(i) The mother exclaims:

" Alas! my daughter feels let down by the Lord who, as Narasimha (Man-Lion), came to Prahlāda's aid. Restive and rattling, she looks out for Him everywhere, her heart melts down in contemplation of the Lord and she cries out for Him in melodious notes expressive of her melancholy".

(ii) The tears flowing down the cheeks of Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī in torrents remind us of Hanumān's query to Sītā, the Divine Mother in captivity, why tears were rolling down her cheeks.

(iii) Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī is looking out here, there and everywhere for the Lord who, she is sure, will never fail to succour His devotees. As Narasiṅkā He had studiously stationed Himself in every nook and corner, pillar and particle. While discoursing on this song, Śri Parāśara Bhaṭṭar said:

" Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī is looking for the Lord even in the folds of her sari.". Had He not once got on to the hip of the Āḻvār in the course of His ascent to the Āḻvār's head? (I-9-4).

(iv) Says the gnostic mother: " My daughter is indeed worried, over and over again, whether the Lord would help only Prahlāda and not her. She has not, however, given up hopes as yet and that is why life is still sticking to her". Face is the index of the mind and Parāṅkuṣa Nāyakī's lingering hopes are reflected on her forehead.

vāḷ-nutal im maṭavaral, ummaik
kāṇum ācaiyuḷ naikiṉṟāḷ; viṟal
vāṇaṉ āyiram tōḷ tuṇittīr! ummaik
kāṇa, nīr irakkam ilīrē. (II–4–2)

Translation

To behold you (of beauty exquisite),
Who, the thousand arms of mighty vāṇaṉ smote,
This young lady of forehead bright
Stands consumed by a burning desire,
But your grace on her you don't confer.

Notes

(i) "Oh, Lord Kṛṣṇa, You secured Uṣā, the daughter of the mighty Bāṇāsura for Aniruddha, your grandson, after chopping off the Asura's thousand sinewy shoulders. And yet you would not relent in the case of my daughter and relieve her distress".

(ii) Reference has again been made to the bright forehead of Parāṅkuṣa Nāyaki only to betray the mother's surprise at the Lord's indifference even to one of such fascinating charm.

(iii) *Mother to the Lord*:

"Oh, it is all topsy-turvy my daughter pining for you! It should be the other way around. It is indeed the Owner who should be all agog to get at his property."

The Lord retorts saying, "Well, your daughter's desire to get at me may be all right but the impediments to the realisation of her desire are heavier still".

But then, the mother is not prepared to swallow this. She asks Him "For one who smote the thousand arms of the mighty Bāṇāsura, is it at all difficult to cut out these impediments?"

irakka maṉattōṭu eri aṇai
arakkum meḻukum okkum ivaḷ;
irakkam eḻīr; itaṟku eṉ ceykēṉ-
arakkaṉ ilaṅkai ceṟṟīrukkē? (II–4–3)

Translation

You, who the demon's Laṅkā did rout,
Relent not for this dame of tender heart,
Who is like unto wax set on fire;
Oh, what can I do for her?

Note

Mother to the Lord

"What you did to reclaim Sītā from her captivity in Laṅkā, how you languished without food and sleep days on end, how you bunded the roaring sea and routed Rāvaṇa's Laṅkā, lock, stock and barrel have been chronicled by sage Vālmīki in his immortal Rāmāyaṇa. And so it is well within the Knowledge of my hapless daughter. Therefore it is she feels tormented why she couldn't get a similar treatment at your hands. Oh, what a contrasting picture! my daughter of melting tenderness of heart, like the wax come in contact with fire, and you, absolutely hard-hearted and unrelenting. What can I do, in between? There is no remedy for this situation except the influx of your sweet grace. I daresay you who did so much for Sītā, will not lay yourself open to the charge of cruel partiality and terrible discrimination by not coming to my daughter's aid, at once."

ilaṅkai ceṟṟavaṉē! eṉṉum; piṉṉum,
valam koḷ puḷ uyarttāy! eṉṉum; uḷḷam
malaṅka vev uyirkkum; kaṇṇīr mikak
kalaṅkik kaitoḻum niṉṟu ivaḷē. (II–4–4)

Translation

Says unto you my daughter, oh, Lord,
"Laṅkā, (for Sītā's sake) you destroyed
And on your banner is the mighty bird (Garuḍa)";
With a mind agitated and breathing hot,

Tears well up her eyes and badly upset,
And stunned she stands, with joined palms.

Notes

Mother to the Lord

(i) "I thought I had consoled my daughter saying that she should sustain herself meditating on your meritorious deeds as Śrī Rāma with the firm belief that you will, some day, succour her as you did Sītā. Even Sītā had to wait for quite some length of time before she was reclaimed from her captivity in Laṅkā. But suddenly my daughter has started crying as before. But then, She says that you were pining for Sītā all the time, but you just can't remember this poor girl. It is not as if you lack the means of locomotion if only you wished to come and meet my daughter. She is well aware that the mighty Garuḍa, moving at supersonic speed, is always at your disposal. And so she concludes it is sheer indifference on your part. On the other hand she is very much agitated and bursting with tears. Nevertheless, with joined palms she is worshipping You. I just don't know what to do".

(ii) It is worth noting that, whatever be the mood and mode of speech of the Āḻvār, be he calm or agitated, his basic stance as the Lord's sole servitor (Śeṣatva) remains quite *in tact*; in other words, his essential nature (svarūpa) does not undergo any modification. That is how reference is made to the Parāṅkuṣa Nāyakī's worshipping posture even in such an extremely critical state of mental cogitation (see, in this connection, aphorism 119 of 'Ācārya Hṛdayam').

ivaḷ irāppakal vāyverīt taṉa
kuvaḷai oṇ kaṇṇa nīr koṇṭāḷ; vaṇṭu
tivaḷum taṇ am tuḷāy koṭir-eṉa
tavaḷa vaṇṇar takavukaḷē? (II–4–5)

Translation

Day and night this girl keeps babbling
And in her flowery eyes tears are swelling;

You don't on her bestow your tulaci garland, cool and lovely,
Swarmed by bees; What has happened, (I can't see)
To you of disposition pure and your quality of mercy.

Note

(i) Mother to the Lord

"Well, if you don't relent even in such a precarious condition of my daughter what indeed has happened to your quality of mercy? Has it dried up altogether?

My daughter is talking about you all the time whereas it should be the other way round. We know from Hanumān's report to Sītā how you kept pining for her, spending sleepless days and nights, thinking and talking about her all the time. Oh, what a pity! the eyes of my daughter which should shed tears of joy are bursting with sorrow. After all, what does she want from you? Nothing more than the cool tulaci garland from your person in replacement of the withered one on her feverish body, consumed by the pangs of separation from you. Actually, she envies the bees gaily swarming your garland studded with honey, and even wishes that she had been born as one of those fortunate bees".

(ii) Reference has been made by the mother to the Lord's purity of disposition and quality of mercy in this context rather sneeringly. Śrī Parāśara Bhaṭṭar would put it that the mother means to say, "Well, if there were a few persons like you the girls would indeed prosper very well!"

takavu uṭaiyavaṉē! eṉṉum; piṉṉum,
mika virumpum pirāṉ! eṉṉum; eṉatu
aka-uyirkku amutē! eṉṉum-uḷḷam
uka urukiniṉṟu uḷuḷé. (II–4–6)

Translation

Says my daughter, with a mind thawing,
Right from the inner core of her being,
"Oh, Lord! you are indeed merciful,

You are my highly coveted Benefactor,
And to my inner soul, the nectar".

Notes

(i) In the preceding stanza the mother complained about a heartless Lord, who had put her daughter in such a parlous predicament. But no sooner had the mother opened her mouth, with such a reproach on her tongue than the daughter (Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī) gagged it effectively, despite her pangs of separation from the Lord, by proclaiming that the Lord is an inexhaustible fountain of grace and a highly coveted Benefactor. To dub Him as devoid of mercy would be just as inconceivable as the ocean getting emptied of all its water.

(ii) A close parallel to this can be found in Rāmāyaṇa, Sundara Kāṇḍa, 26-13 where, even while bemoaning her captivity in Laṅkā, Sītā extolled the great qualities of Śrī Rāma and lamented that one of such excellence had not so far come to her rescue merely because she lacked the requisite felicity, being totally devoid of grace because of the offence thrown by her, once at Rāma and a much greater offence at Lakṣmaṇa later on. This clearly shows that there can be absolutely on flaw or drawback in the Lord warranting His being given up on any account, even in trying moments of separation from Him. As a matter of fact, what is sought to be classified as a drawback in the Lord, if at all, is just the mental agony inflicted by Him on the devotees when He doesn't favour them with His nectarean presence. But even this has a purpose behind, forming, as it does, part of the Lord's technique of shock-treatment whereby the devotee's appetite for God is whetted.

uḷuḷ āvi ularntu ularntu, eṉa
vaḷḷalē! kaṇṇaṉē! eṉṉum; piṉṉum,
veḷḷa nīrk kiṭantāy! eṉṉum-eṉa
kaḷvi tāṉ paṭṭa vañcaṉaiyē! (II-4-7)

Translation

Enticed by the Lord is my daughter
And her inner soul is fully dried
And yet from me she tries to hide
And cries out, "Oh, my liberal Lord,
Kaṇṇā, resting on oceanic waters".

Notes

(i) With an aching heart the mother gives expression to her daughter's enticement by the Lord and her present critical condition. The soul which is inherently incapable of being burnt or dried up, is said to have been dried up in Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī's case. And yet, she tries to keep her mother off the track and lauds her beloved Lord.

(ii) Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī says her Lord is a great Benefactor, a liberal donor and all that, just like a person in deep thirst calling repeatedly, 'water, water' or chewing up bits of refined camphor.

(iii) In Viṣṇu dharma, one is advised to meditate on Lord Narasimha, while moving about in a frightfully dark night, to ward off evils; likewise, one, in dire distress or deep thirst, should think of the Lord reclining in the milky ocean.

(iv) Śrī Rāma had exclaimed that he couldn't be away from Sītā, the dark-eyed, even for a trice.

The Lord's position vis-a-vis Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī should also be just the same and yet, the mother witnesses things happening in the reverse order here and she, therefore, calls it a mere treachery.

vañcaṉē! eṉṉum; kaitoḻum; taṉa
neñcam vēva neṭitu uyirkkum-viṟal–
kañcaṉai vañcaṉai ceytīr! ummait
tañcam eṉṟu ivaḷ paṭṭaṉavē! (II-4-8)

Translation

Oh, Slayer of heady Kañcaṉ, here is my daughter
Who in you refuge sought and is now in great distress;

The heavy sigh she heaves, her heart blisters ;
And yet, with folded hands she does your treachery own,
How You made her your vassal, to her unknown.

Notes

(i) When the mother complained in the previous song about the treacherous enticement of her daughter by the Lord, Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī could not bear this affront to her beloved Lord. Uttering the same word, 'treachery', as the mother did, the Nāyakī gives it a different complexion. The Lord's treachery lies in the great good He has done her by making her His vassal *unknown to her*.

(ii) The daughter's distress, referred to by the Mother, can be analysed as follows:

She does not go after food and raiment like the worldlings;

Nor does she enjoy the heavenly bliss like the celestials in Heaven;

She cannot wait patiently till, one day, the final goal is reached;

Nor does the Lord finish her off as He did the heady Kamsa, upsetting all his nefarious plans.

How tantalising, and that too, for one whose sole refuge is the Lord! This is the mother's complaint.

paṭṭa-pōtu eḻu-pōtu aṟiyāḷ; virai
maṭṭu alar taṇ-tuḷāy eṉṉum-cuṭar
vaṭṭa vāy nuti nēmiyīr! numatu
iṭṭam eṉkol, iv ēḻaikkē? (II–4–9)

Translation

Neither Sun-rise nor Sun-set, my daughter knows
And yet her mouth utters "tulacī, cool and fragrant,
Studded with honey", Oh Sire, holding the discuss effulgent,

Sharp and round! what indeed do you propose
To do with this girl who is so innocent?

Notes

(i) Unlike the worldlings who know day and night too well, earning by day and spending by night those earnings on worldly pleasures, Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī is altogether ignorant of Sun-rise and Sun-set. Does it mean that she is not sentient? She is no doubt sentient as her mouth constantly utters the words 'tulacī cool and fragrant, studded with honey'.

(ii) When the Lord was indifferent to the above observations of the mother she asked Him;

"Sire, the effulgent discus in your hand is ever ready to go into action, helping your devotees and destroying the evil-doers. What precisely do you intend to do with my daughter? Will you get rid of her as you did Hiraṇya and his brood?

or

Will you elevate her to the rank of the celestials on the Yonder heaven and enjoy her bewitching beauty, enhanced still further by the conch and discus in her hands?

or

Will you put her back among the worldlings buried in earthly pleasures oblivious of their essential nature and their relationship with you?"

ēḻai pētai irāppakal taṉa
kēḷ il oṇ kaṇṇa nīrkoṇṭāḷ; kiḷar
vāḷvai vēva ilaṅkai ceṟṟīr! ivaḷ
māḻai nōkku oṉṟum vāṭṭēṉmiṉē. (II–4–10)

Translation

Laṅkā's spectacular wealth you routed, Oh, Sire,
This poor girl's eyes of peerless beauty shed tears

Day and night; may you keep, at least,
The youthful looks in her eyes in tact!

Notes

Mother to the Lord

"The tears welling up my daughter's eyes day and night resemble the water drops around the lotus leaf shining like pearls, a sight indeed for you which you cannot afford to miss. Actually it is you that had worked her up to such a pitch and would you not like to behold and enjoy the fruits of your labours?

Is it not a sight for Gods, the rapturous ravishment of the love-smitten Saint, when his whole being thrills with love and his eyes swim with pearls of tears?

If you think that there are heavy impediments in the way of your joining my daughter can't you eradicate them even as you routed the demoniac Rāvaṇa's Laṅkā? Well, if you are intent upon destroying my daughter also, please do not go the whole hog out as you did in the case of Rāvaṇa, but spare at least her bewitching looks which is about all that remains of her now.

If she passes away we will lose her. But mind you, you will lose your very source of sustenance. You are known to subsist on the sweet looks of your consorts. It is up to you now not to run into a personal loss of such a magnitude".

vāṭṭam il pukaḻ vāmaṉaṉai icai
kūṭṭi, vaṇ caṭakōpaṉ col amai
pāṭṭu ōr āyirattu ip pattāl aṭi
cūṭṭalākum am tāmamē. (II–4–11)

Translation

Those that recite these songs ten,
Out of the thousand melodious songs of Caṭakōpaṉ,
Graciously composed and grammatically clean,
In adoration of Vāmaṉaṉ of undying renown,

Will have the fortune great,
To offer lovely flowers at His feet.

Notes

(i) Those that recite these ten songs will be endowed with the bliss of rendering perennial service at the feet of the Lord in the company of the 'Nitya Sūris' in Heaven, the very bliss coveted by the Āḻvār at the end of the last decad, without passing through any of the sufferings undergone by the Āḻvār.

(ii) In the first song of this decad reference was made to Parāṅkuṣa Nāyakī withering down. Actually her condition reflects the state of the Lord as well. And now that mention is made of Vāmaṉaṉ of undying fame, it can be inferred that He rose to His full stature by responding to the mother's call to preserve her daughter's looks, the very source of His sustenance. And so He is back again face to face with the Saint.

(iii) Mention has been made here of Vāmaṉaṉ, in particular, as He was known to be very keen about the reclamation of His possessions even if it involved His having to seek alms. And now, will He lag behind even after the mother had begged of Him to take particular care of His very source of sustenance?

Second Centum Fifth Decad (II-5)
(Am Tāmattu Aṉpu)

Preamble

The sufferings undergone by the Āḻvār, as set out in the last decad, are comparable to the titanic struggle of Gajendra, the elephant, with the crocodile. Even as the Lord rushed, with an aching heart, to the pond post-haste on hearing the alarum raised by the elephant the Lord felt exceedingly remorseful that He did not rush to meet the Āḻvār as soon as the latter became critical of His nonchalance, that is, His not rushing to his aid despite His having the mighty Garuḍa to carry Him anywhere at supersonic

speed. See II-4-4. By way of making amends for this remissness, the Lord has now come to the Āḻvār, in all His splendour and paraphernalia and is at the height of His joy in the blessed company of the Saint. Beholding the joyous Lord, the Saint feels immensely delighted and relates, in this decad, his ecstatic experience.

am tāmattu aṉpu ceytu eṉ āvi cēr ammāṉukku
am tāmam vāḷ muṭi caṅku āḻi nūl āram uḷa ;
centāmaraittaṭam kaṇ; ceṅkaṉi vāy ceṅkamalam ;
centāmarai aṭikaḷ; cempoṉ tiru-uṭampē. (II–5–1)

Translation

The Lord stands in my soul stationed,
Looking upon it as the lovely Heaven, wears He a pretty garland,
The dazzling crown, conch and discus, sacred thread
And chain; His eyes are like red lotus ponds,
His lips and feet also like lotus red, aglow is His person like red gold.

Notes

(i) It is the Lord's will that the Āḻvār should be kept in this abode a little longer for the benefit of humanity at large. The Āḻvār, however, aspired to enter the gatherings of the celestials in the yonder Heaven and sing the Lord's glory profusely and for ever in their holy company. See II-3-10. As a compromise, the Lord meets the aspiration of the Āḻvār by conferring on him the heavenly bliss longed for by him right here. The Āḻvār rejoices that the Lord exhibits unto him all that love which He bears for the celestials and describes the Lord's glowing features.

(ii) Tirumālai Āṇṭāṉ, referred to earlier, told Śrī Rāmānuja, while studying this song, that he had heard it said by his preceptor, yāmunā-ārya, that the Āḻvār rejoices in this song as the Lord has joined him along with the entire band of 'Nityā Sūris' as aspired for by him. But Śrī Rāmānuja opined that this song relates how the Lord's person, His jewels, weapons etc, all of which

lacked lustre and were as good as non-existent before He mingled with the Āḻvār, now shine with extra brilliance which fascinated the Āḻvār so much.

(ii) Yet another version is: In that section of the Vedās, known as the 'Antarāditya Vidya,' the Lord is said to shine inside the Sun, assuming a body glittering like gold, lotus-eyed, bejewelled and so on; the Lord has now entered the Āḻvār's person with all that splendour.

tiru-uṭampu vāṉ cuṭar; centāmarai kaṇ; kai kamalam;
tiru iṭamē mārvam; ayaṉ iṭame koppūḻ;
oruvu iṭamum entai perumāṟku araṉē; ō!
oruvu iṭam oṉṟu iṉṟi, eṉṉuḷ kalantāṉukkē. (II–5–2)

Translation

Oh, what a wonder! the Lord who holds on His chest
Tiru (Lakṣmī), whose navel is Brahmā's seat while the rest
Is by Araṉ held, has with me mingled, leaving vacant
No space in my body; beams my Sire's body with rare brilliance
And aglow like the lotus red are His eyes and hands.

Notes

(i) Lakṣmī, the Divine Mother, stands ensconced on the Lord's chest; Brahmā, the demi-urge, appointed by the Lord to create all the fourteen worlds, would not budge from His navel and the rest of the Lord's body is occupied by Araṉ (Rudra). One so great has now come and taken possession of the entire body of the Āḻvār. Thrilled by his contact with the Lord's exquisite person, the Āḻvār describes His lustrous body. When He casts loving glances at the Āḻvār, the latter sees His lotus eyes proclaiming His overlordship (Sovereignty and Supremacy). Apprehending the frightful possibility of the Āḻvār once again resiling, overwhelmed by the Lord's Sovereignty, the Lord catches hold of the Āḻvār by the hand. At once, the Āḻvār describes the lotus hand that gripped him.

(ii) While discoursing on this song, the great Preceptor, Nañcīyar feelingly remarked:

(iii) "The Āḻvār, who is our greatest well-wisher, speaks of the Lord's body beaming with brilliance. Indeed, there is hardly a sin as heinous as denying the Lord, His form and attributes, even as there is no favour done by the Lord to us, so great as this one of our being kept outside the pale of such a heresy".

(iv) It is noteworthy that it is not a mere fantastic visionary but Saint Śaṭakōpa, endowed by an Omniscient Lord with knowledge, full and complete, shorn of doubts, despair, discrepancies and deviations, (See I-1-1) that goes into raptures over the Lord's exquisite Form. Compare also, Lord Rāma offering His body, in embrace, to Hanumān, the glorious emissary, on the latter's return from his pioneering visit to Laṅkā, deemed by the Lord as the choicest gift, He could māke, befitting the particular context. Surely, it was not an illusory or fictitious body that the Lord palmed off as the choicest gift but one most coveted by Himself and specifically assumed by Him for the purpose of His avatāra.

eṉṉuḷ kalantavaṉ ceṅkaṉi vāy ceṅkamalam;
miṉṉum cuṭar-malaikkuk kaṇ, pātam, kai kamalam;
maṉṉum muḻu ēḻ ulakum vayiṟṟiṉ uḷa;
taṉṉuḷ kalavātatu eṉ poruḷum tāṉ ilaiyē. (II–5–3)

Translation

The One, in me mingled, sparkles like a dazzling mount,
Like unto the lotus red are His mouth, eyes, feet and hands,
His stomach does all the worlds seven sustain,
There's scarcely a thing that doesn't in Him converge.

Notes

(i) Not only Lakṣmī, Brahmā and Rudra, but whatever exists subsists in Him alone. Even so, it is now made to appear that the Lord cannot subsist except by mingling with the Āḻvār, who has, in this context, given Him yet another name (like Nārāyaṇa Vāsudēva) namely, 'The one in me mingled'.

(ii) The Lord is in full bloom and joy only after He mingled with the Āḻvār and has acquired stability like a mountain. The Lord's resplendent person, eyes, mouth, hands and feet, all resembling red lotus, are indeed far more attractive now, than ever before, having acquired new dimensions. Little wonder then, the Āḻvār is never tired of describing the Lord's exquisite form and His charming features, as reoriented.

eṉ poruḷum tāṉ āy, maratakak kuṉṟam okkum;
appoḻutait tāmaraippūk kaṇ pātam; kai kamalam;
eppoḻutum nāḷ tiṅkaḷ āṇṭu ūḻi ūḻitoṟum
appoḻutaikku appoḻutu eṉ ārā amutamē. (II–5–4)

Translation

The Lord, who in Him all things contains,
Like unto an emerald mount shines;
With eyes, feet and hands, like red lotus in fresh bloom,
A non-satiate nectar unto me He is, at all times,
Thro' days, months, years and aeons.

Note

In his preamble to this song, the illustrious Nampiḷḷai says: Seeing the Āḻvār comparing repeatedly the Lord's eyes, lips, hands and feet to red lotus, some persons asked him why he went on repeating the same thing. The Āḻvār rejoined, "Well, I cannot help saying so, for every moment, down the days, months, years and a whole epoch, there is a freshness about Him, like the lotus in fresh bloom and hence there is no room for satiety nor is there any question of an insipid repetition of something, stale and static.

ārā amutamāy alāviyuḷ kalanta
kār ār karumukil pōl eṉ ammāṉ kaṇṇaṉukku
nērā vāy cempavaḷam, kaṇ pātam kai kamalam;
pērāram nīḷ muṭi nāṇ piṉṉum iḻai palavē. (II–5–5)

Translation

The non-satiate nectar, the cloud-hued Lord,
Has into my worthless soul entered;
Can the fruits red compare with the lips of Kaṇṇaṉ, my Sire;
Or the lotus flower match His eyes, hands and feet, ever?
Many indeed are His jewels, the crown, tall and majestic,
The necklace huge, waist band and all that.

Note

The Āḻvār who was hitherto comparing the Lord's lips to red fruits and His eyes, hands and feet to the red lotus flower, has now a closer look at the Lord inside him and finds that the Lord is of matchless beauty and incomparable excellence and that the things hitherto compared with Him, stand nowhere. Then the Āḻvār beholds the vast array of jewels on the Lord's person and starts enumerating them, only to give it up as impossible. The Lord's crown, tall and majestic, proclaims His sovereignty over the entire Universe, comprising the two Vibhūtis 'Nitya Vibhūti' (Eternal Land) and the 'Lila Vibhūti' (Sportive Universe).

palapalavē āparaṇam; pērum palapalavē;
palapalavē cōti vaṭivu; paṇpu eṇṇil,
palapala kaṇṭu, uṇṭu, kēṭṭu, uṟṟu, mōntu iṉpam;
palapalavē ñāṉamum: pāmpu-aṇai mēlārkēyō! (II–5–6)

Translation

The Lord who on serpent bed reclines,
(Has acquired inside me dimensions new);
Were I to pause and examine His union
With me, an endless variety unto me He unravels,
Of jewels, Forms exquisite and how in me He revels
Thro' the sensual channels many with appropriate Know-how.

Notes

(i) The Āḻvār feels that the Lord, in union with him, is not satisfied with His assumption of a single form, a single set of jewels, a single method of enjoyment of the Āḻvār through the senses of seeing, smelling etc, or single type of knowledge but wants to enjoy the Āḻvār in myriad ways, employing different techniques, assuming different forms, displaying different sets of jewels, so on and so forth.

(ii) As Nampiḷḷai puts it, the Lord wants to enjoy the Āḻvār, assuming many forms, as Sage Śaubhari did, with regard to his umpteen wives. The Lord exhibits the same ardour in His enjoyment of the Āḻvār as the emancipated soul does, on reaching Heaven, for enjoying the Lord.

pāmpu-aṇaimēl pāṟkaṭaluḷ paḷḷi amarntatuvum,
kāmpu aṇai tōḷ-piṉṉaikkuāy ēṟu uṭaṉ ēḻ ceṟṟatuvum,
tēm paṇaiya cōlai marāmaram ēḻ eytatuvum,
pūm piṇaiya taṇ-tuḻāyp poṉ muṭi am pōr ēṟē. (II–5–7)

Translation

Trim and lovely, like the martial bull, my Lord,
Sporting the gold crown and the tulasi garland,
Cool and well-knit, on the serpent-bed reclined
In the milk-ocean, tamed all at once the bulls seven
For the sake of Piṉṉai of shoulders fine and pierced the trees seven.

Notes

(i) In terms of the new technique adopted by the Lord, as set out in the previous song, the Lord exhibited a few of the wondrous deeds performed by Him long back and the Āḻvār records them here, as envisioned by him.

(ii) According to one tradition, Nappiṉṉai, the charming shepherdess, believed to be an incarnation of Goddess Nīlā Devi, was a niece of Yaśodhā. Her father had set up a precondition for any one seeking her hand, namely, the taming of seven unruly bulls, all at once. Śrī Kṛṣṇa assumed seven different forms, tackled these bulls effectively and tamed them to win the charming bride. A Demon named Kālanēmi had been slain by the Lord in a previous Yuga. The seven sons of the

demon swore vendetta against the Lord and were reborn as seven bulls, determined to kill Śrī Kṛṣṇa.

poṉ muṭi am pōr ēṟṟai, emmāṉai, nāl-taṭam tōḷ
taṉ muṭivu oṉṟu illāta taṉ-tuḷāy mālaiyaṉai,
eṉ muṭivu kāṇātē eṉṉuḷ kalantāṉai,
colmuṭivu kāṇēṉ nāṉ; colluvatu eṉ? collīrē. (II–5–8)

Translation

Majestic like the warring bull is my Lord,
Sporting the gold cown, of sinewy shoulders four,
Of limitless glory, wearing the cool tulaci garland;
Mingled He with me, not minding my status poor,
Falter do I as I attempt to sing His glory interminable,
Better tell me how to laud (my Lord), ye worldlings voluble!

Notes

(i) The Āḻvār says that it is beyond his capacity to describe the condescending love of One, so great, mingling with him, so low.

(ii) The Lord's crown and tulaci garland proclaim His sovereignty. If His glory is limitless, there is also no limit to the Āḻvār's abjectness and yet He has chosen to mingle with the Āḻvār. By His deeds and traits, the Lord enthralled the Āḻvār who, however, finds that words are not adequate to describe his experience. On the other hand, the worldlings revel in their own spheres and wax eloquent. The Āḻvār turns round and asks them how they could freely indulge in all that rhetoric, when he himself suffered from tardiness of expression, overawed.

collīr eṉ ammāṉai; eṉ āvi āvitaṉai;
ellai il cīr eṉ karumāṇikkac cuṭarai:
nalla amutam, peṟaṟku ariya vīṭum āy,
alli malar virai ottu, āṇ allaṉ; peṇ alaṉē. (II–5–9)

Translation

Better sing the praise of my Sire,
The Soul of my soul, the lustrous sapphire,

Of auspicious qualities endless, the delectable nectar,
The Ordainer great of ' Mokṣā ', difficult to attain,
Sweet like the fragrance of the lotus flower,
Neither the male nor the female we know of.

Notes

(i) Although the Āḻvār found himself speechless, yet he could not resist the urge to sing the Lord's praise, in the company of the worldlings. And, therefore, he exhorts them to desist from the worldly affairs, at least for a while, and sing the Lord's glory along with him.

(ii) Being a ' Puruṣa ' (Male), the Lord is certainly not a female and being a ' Puruṣottama ' (gem of a male), He is very different from the other males, we know of. That is why it has been said here that He is neither the male nor the female *of the known variety.*

āṇ allaṉ; peṇ allaṉ; allā aliyum allaṉ;
kāṇalum ākāṉ; uḷaṉ allaṉ; illai allaṉ;
pēṇuṅkāl, pēṇum uru ākum; allaṉum ām:
kōṇai peritu uṭaittu em pemmāṉaik kūṟutalē. (II–5–10)

Translation

' Tis indeed very difficult to sing precisely, my Lord's glory
Neither male nor female is He nor the eunuch neutral,
He exists not, nor does He not exist;
Him the naked eye can't see and yet He assumes
The form the devout desire while unto others He is just inaccessible.

Note

In Ṛig Veda, ' Āraṇyaka ', the Lord is said to be quite apart, that is, different from the rest. Therefore it is, the Āḻvār says that He is neither male nor female, nor the 'in-between'. A Tamil Pundit, who was listening to Śrī Parāśara Bhaṭṭar's discourse on this song, observed that it smacked of the doctrine of nothingness (Śūṉya), as the Lord could not be brought under any of the three known categories of beings. But the learned discourser pointed out that, in this song, the

Lord has not been referred to, in the neuter gender but described only in the masculine gender, as a male, who is, however, very different from other males and hence not the male, we know of.

kūṟutal oṉṟu ārāk kuṭak kūtta ammāṉaik
kūṟutalē mēvik kurukūrc caṭakōpaṉ
kūṟiṉa antāti ōr āyirattuḷ ip pattum
kūṟutal vallār uḷarēl, kūṭuvar vaikuntamē. (II–5–11)

Translation

Those that can recite these stanzas ten,
Out of the thousand sung by Kurukūr Caṭakōpaṉ,
Keen to recount the traits, beyond description,
Of (Lord Kṛṣṇa), the great pot-dancer, will the high heaven attain.

Notes

(i) Those, conversant with this decad, will atain Heaven without undergoing any of the sufferings, passed through by the Āḻvār as set out in the last decad. It is like the sons enjoying, with ease, the property acquired by the father, by dint of hard labour and sufferings.

(ii) It is not the Lord's transcendental glory that baffles description but His easy accessibility and wondrous deeds like pot-dancing etc., during His Avatār as Lord Kṛṣṇa. If, however, the Āḻvār could manage to talk about the Lord's 'Saulabhya' or simplicity galore, it is indeed the victory of his faith, his deep love for God, infused in him by the Lord Himself.

Second Centum—Sixth Decad (II-6)
(Vaikuntā Manivaṇṇaṉē)

Preamble

As set out, in the last decad, the Āḻvār is experiencing the Supreme bliss of Union with the Lord, like Heaven transplanted right here. And what about the Lord? In the supreme joy of

His union with the Āḻvār, the Lord is exploring new avenues of regaling him as well as those associated with him. What a fine reciprocity?

In II-3, the Āḻvār pined for the company of the Lord's devotees and now the Lord's love for the Āḻvār extends to his devotees as well. But at the same time, He also apprehends the possibility of the Āḻvār slipping back to his old ways and shrinking away from Him, overwhelmed by His transcendent glory. The Āḻvār feels the Lord's pulse all right and hastens to assure Him that he would not give up his Lord on any account and that his present grip on Him is very tight indeed.

Śrī Nampiḷḷai likens the Lord's apprehension, referred to above, to Śrī Rāma's apprehension whether the extremely happy days, he and Sīta had in Citrakūṭ in each other's delightful company, would at all go on for all time, being too good to last long.

vaikuntā! maṇivaṇṇaṉē! eṉ pollāt tirukkuṟaḷā! eṉṉuḷ maṉṉi.
vaikum vaikal tōṟum amutu āya vāṉ ēṟē!
cey kuntā arum tīmai uṉ aṭiyarkkut tīrttu, acurarkkut tīmaikaḷ
cey kuntā! uṉṉai nāṉ piṭittēṉ; koḷ cikkeṉavē. (II–6–1)

Translation

Of sapphire hue, oh, Vaikunta! (Lord of Heaven)
My lovely midget (Vāmana)! in my heart, steadfast you remain,
Oh, Chief of celestials! unto me You are nectarean,
Every fleeting moment; You redeem Your devotees' dire sins
And to the Acuras You just pass them on.
Kuntā (Immaculate Lord)! firm unto You I hold on, please note.

Notes

(i) In the last decad, even while enjoying the bliss of the Lord's union with him, the Āḻvār referred to himself as worthless (II-5-5) and as being lowly without limit, even as there is no limit to the Lord's greatness (II-5-8). Naturally, expressions such as these roused the suspicion of the Lord that the Āḻvār, whose company He covets so much, might once again be caught up in a vein of abject humility and want to run away from Him. But

the Āḷvār assures an agitated Lord that He could trust him, when he says that he won't think of leaving Him at all. Here is a picture, in the reverse order, if one recalls a similar assurance held out by Lord Kṛṣṇa to an agitated Arjuna. (Gītā XVIII-66).

(ii) Reference to Vāmana, in the second line of this stanza, is given a beautiful turn by Nampiḷḷai. Vāmana Mūrti's charming personality and wonderful comportment, baffling description, were lost on all else except the Āḷvār, who was enthralled by these qualities of the Lord and could get Him lodged in his heart. This was indeed a great loss to Indra, who was mindful of his only gain merely, the return of his lost kingdom and to Mahābali, whose only concern was to maintain his reputation as a great donor. There was absolutely no question of the others then on the scene, the ungodly Śukrācārya, who was made to lose his eye, and Namuṣi, who was hurled, high up in the sky, having been attracted by Vāmana's enthralling charm. The sole beneficiary is, therefore, Nammāḷvār, in whom such a charming Lord now stands enshrined.

(iii) The grip of the Āḷvār on the Lord is said to be so tight that even the Lord cannot shake him off, if He wished to do so.

cikkeṉac ciṟitu ōr iṭamum puṟappaṭāt taṉṉuḷḷē ulakukaḷ
okkavē viḻuṅkip pukuntāṉ; pukuntataṟpiṉ, [eṅkum
mikka ñāṉa veḷḷac cuṭar-viḷakkuāy, tuḷakku aṟṟu, amutamāy,
pakkam nōkku aṟiyāṉ, eṉ paintāmaraik kaṇṇaṉē (II–6–2)

Translation

With all the worlds in His stomach, neatly compressed
(And all His regal duties, duly disposed)
The resolute Lord has got inside me and thus transposed,
His radiant Knowledge, in spate, shines forth like the lamp bright;
Feeling firm and secure, with the assurance from me got,

My nectar, the lotus-eyed Lord, sees not
This side or that (and is in me so rapt).

Notes

(i) In the original text of this stanza, mention has been made of the Lord having gulped down all the worlds and kept them secure in His stomach, before entering the Āḷvār's body. What the poet intends to say is that the Lord attended not only to this particular duty but all His other regal duties, as well, so that, once He enters the Āḷvār's body, His rapport with the Āḷvār may go on undisturbed, unlike the worshipper, ostensibly in front of the Deity in the Sanctum Sanctorum, but anxious, all the time, about the safety of the pair of new Sandals, left by him at the temple gate.

(ii) The Knowledge of the Omniscient Lord is said to have acquired new dimensions after His entering the Āḷvār's body and thus shines with extra brilliance. And then, so completely rapt and engrossed with the Āḷvār is the Lord that He wouldn't turn His attention elsewhere, not even when Lakṣmī, the Lord's favourite spouse, puts her fair arms round His neck and draws Him extremely close to her breast. The following anecdote is very apt and can easily drive home the point.

(iii) On being informed by his preceptor, Maṇakkāl Nampi (Śrī Rāma Miśra), that one Kurukaikkāval Appaṉ had a Yogic secret to communicate, Āḷavantār (Yāmuna) journeyed all the way to Kaṅkaikoṇṭa-Cōḷapuram, to meet the said Yogi. As Appaṉ was seated, deeply engrossed in Yoga, facing a wall, Āḷavantār dared not disturb the Yogi and kept himself behind, at some distance. Lo! Appaṉ suddenly turned round and enquired whether some one belonging to the 'Coṭṭai' clan was standing behind. While humbly introducing himself as one of the said pedigree, Āḷavantār begged the Yogi to disclose how the presence of one staying well behind was at all

perceived. Appaṉ revealed that, while holding a rapport with him, the Lord would not allow Himself to be disturbed by any one including His alluring and most-beloved spouse, Lakṣmī, and yet, pressing his neck, the Lord turned round, thrice or four times, in the hind direction. The Yogi was well aware that such an extra-ordinary preference was shown by the Lord only to members of the 'Coṭṭai' family and hence his enquiry, as above. Āḷavantār was the grandson of Śrīmaṉ Nāthamuṉi of 'Coṭṭai' pedigree (the family name). This shows that next to Nammāḷvār, affection of such great magnitude was lavished by the Lord, only on Śrīmaṉ Nāthamuṉi and his descendants.

tāmaraik kaṇṇaṉai, viṇṇōr paravum talaimakaṉai, tuḷāy viraip
pū maruvu kaṇṇi em pirāṉai, poṉmalaiyai [alar
nām maruvi naṉku ētti uḷḷi vaṇaṅki nām makiḻntu āṭa, nāvu
pā maruvi niṟkat tanta pāṉmaiyē! vaḷḷalē! (II–6–3)

Translation

Adored by the Celestials, the lotus-eyed Lord,
My benefactor great wearing the tulacī garland,
Knit with fragrant flowers, a veritable mountain of gold,
Him even we could well extol, singing thro' songs, by us composed,
And dancing in ecstasy, meditate and worship, how generous of Him indeed!

Notes

(i) Entranced by the sweet glances from His lotus eyes, the celestials keep singing His glory, all the time. It was indeed very generous of the Lord, as the Āḷvār would put it, that He could likewise enable even him, so low, to meditate on Him and compose songs in His praise and sing besides revealing to him, out of His own free will and grace, His exquisite beauty, bedecked with tulacī garland, ever cool, ever lovely and ever fragrant.

(ii) Reference to the Lord, as a mountain of gold, shows that He is firmly established inside the Āḷvār, firm as a rock.

vaḷḷalē! matucūtaṉā! eṉ marakata malaiyē! uṉai niṉaintu,
eḷkal tanta entāy! uṉṉai eṉṉaṉam viṭukēṉ– [ukantu,
veḷḷamē purai niṉ pukaḻ kuṭaintu āṭip pāṭik kaḷittu, ukantu
uḷḷa nōykaḷ ellām turantu, uyntu pōntiruntē? (II–6–4)

Translation

My generous Lord! Matucūtaṉā! my delectable emerald Mount!
My Sire! unto me You granted a mind, in you engrossed,
Immersed in Your oceanic traits singing in merriment
Your glory great and dancing; from all ills and evils released,
You I have attained, how shall I give you up indeed?

Note

In the preceding song, the Āḷvār was again harping on his lowliness while acknowledging the many favours done to him by the Lord. Naturally, such expressions of the Āḷvār's abject humility make the Lord ill at ease but the Āḷvār hastens to assure Him that, as the recipient of His spontaneous grace in the form of multifarious favours, he shall not give up the Lord, on any account. These favours include, of course, the removal of many an impediment in the way of their union, not the least of which is the Āḷvār's inferiority complex, even as the Lord slew the demon, Madhu. All the erstwhile miseries and shortcomings of the Āḷvār stand drowned in the rapturous enjoyment, currently going on, singing and dancing in great merriment. There is, therefore, no question of his giving up such a generous Lord.

uyntu pōntu, eṉ ulappu ilāta vem tiviṉaikaḷai nācam ceytu,
antam il aṭimai aṭaintēṉ; viṭuvēṉō– [uṉatu
aintu paintalai āṭu aravu-aṇai mēvip pāṟkaṭal yōka nittirai
cintai ceyta entāy! uṉṉaic cintai ceytu ceytē? (II–6–5)

Translation

My Sire! in thoughts of universal welfare absorbed,
You rest in the milky ocean, on Your five-hooded serpent-bed;
Meditating on You, ever and anon, I stand delivered
From my endless sins deadly and now in your perennial service ushered
Will I from you ever try to get severed?

Notes

(i) Totally absorbed, that he is, in the daily service of the Lord, the Āḻvār avers that there is no question of his giving Him up.

(ii) Ādiśeṣa (First servant) on whom the Lord rests in 'Yoga Nidrā', the highest form of psychic activity or self-activisation, is steeped in the enjoyment of perennial service unto the Lord, in many ways. Through each of his five heads, he gives vent to his joy, like the river in spate branching off into canals. Even as those under the influence of liquor dance about, Ādi-Śeṣa, intoxicated with God-love, gives expression to it by making his heads (hoods) dance with joy.

uṉṉaic cintai ceytu ceytu, uṉ neṭu mā moḻi icai pāṭi, āṭi, eṉ
muṉṉait tīviṉaikaḷ muḻu vēr arintaṉaṉ yāṉ;
uṉṉaic cintaiyiṉāl ikaḻnta iraṇiyaṉ akal mārvam kīṇṭa eṉ
muṉṉaik kōḷariyē! muṭiyātatu eṉ eṉakkē? (II–6–6)

Translation

Mighty Narasiṅka! my primordial Lord!
You split the broad chest of Iraṇiyaṉ, the demon,
Who inwardly despised you but here am I, fully delivered
From my age-long sins meditating on you, ever and anon,
Dancing and singing sweetly your glory great
Is there at all anything, this vassal of Yours cannot get?

Notes

Lord: Oh, Āḻvār! is there any thing more I can do for you?

Āḻvār: Sire! what is there I haven't got from you? My age-long sins have been rooted out, with a mind solely rivetted in you, I go on singing your great glory and dance in ecstasy. What more do I need?

The Lord is more keen to reward people than to punish them. Even if one's praise of Him is only lip-deep, the Lord generously takes it at its face value, without probing deeper and exposing the hollowness. His omniscience and omnipotence notwithstanding. On the other hand, when one throws affront at Him, He does not straightaway punish without probing whether the offence was really meant or only casual. That is why Lord Narasiṅka explored Hiraṇya kaśipu, limb by limb, joint by joint, whether there was in him any love lurking for Him anywhere inside the demon. Unfortunately, there was none and the demon had to be vanquished.

muṭiyātatu eṉ eṉakkēl iṉi? muḻu ēḻ ulakum uṇṭāṉ ukantu vantu
aṭiyēṉ uṭpukuntāṉ; akalvāṉum allaṉ iṉi;
ceṭi ār nōykaḷ ellām turantu, emar kīḻ mēl eḻu piṟappum
viṭiyā vem narakattu eṉṟum cērtal māṟiṉarē. (II–6–7)

Translation

What is there, this vassal cannot henceforth attain?
The Lord, who gulped down all the worlds seven,
Entered my mind with great relish, never again
To part from me; those unto me connected for generations,
Seven above and seven below, will from their sins dense
Be freed, and never again shall they enter the cruel abyss, bottomless.

Notes

(i) The bottomless (endless) abyss or eternal hell, referred to here, is the 'Samsāra', the stye of worldly life, in which the worldlings are wallowing, caught up in its interminable labyrinth.

(ii) In the preceding song, the Āḻvār declared that there was nothing he could not attain. When asked by some persons whether he had got everything, the Āḻvār

affirmed that the Lord's benevolent grace did not stop with him alone but extended to all those connected with him, the preceding and succeeding generations alike—that being the case, what more would he need?

māṟi māṟip paḷa piṟappum piṟantu, aṭiyai aṭaintu, uḷḷam tēṟi,
īṟu il iṉpattu iru veḷḷam yāṉ mūḷkiṉaṉ;
pāṟip pāṟi acurar-tam pal kuḷaṅkaḷ nīṟu eḻa, pāy paṟavai oṉṟu
ēṟi vīṟṟiruntāy! uṉṉai eṉṉuḷ nīkkēl entāy! (II–6–8)

Translation

Passed I thro' several gates of birth,
From time to time and now at your lovely feet,
With a mind, pure and chaste,
Immersed am I in the bottomless ocean of mirth.
Mounted on that bird unique, leaping afar, my Sire,
Routing the Asura hordes! pray leave me never.

Notes

(i) Reference to the unique bird (Garuḍa) here is very significant. Even as the Lord presses Garuḍa into service, all the time and never gets parted from him, the Āḻvār prays that the Lord should take service from him for all time, keeping him in close proximity.

(ii) What is it that the Āḻvār did, to attain the feet of the Lord? "Absolutely nothing" is the answer. He went on, taking birth after birth, till one day, the Lord's spontaneous grace alighted on him and took him to His vicinity, like unto the twig in the mid-ocean getting washed ashore, by successive waves.

entāy! taṉ tiruvēṅkaṭattuḷ niṉṟāy! ilaṅkai ceṟṟāy! marāmaram
paintāḷ ēḻ uruva oru vāḷi kōtta villā!
kontu ār taṉ am tuḷāyiṉāy! amutē! uṉṉai eṉṉuḷḷē kuḻaitta em
maintā! vāṉ ēṟē! iṉi eṅkup pōkiṉṟatē? (II–6–9)

Translation

My Lord! gracing Tiruvēṅkaṭam, you stand on the cool mountain,
You routed Laṅkā, pierce you did the tough trees seven
With a single arrow, lovely tulacī garland, bushy and cool
You sport, my Nectar! into me dissolved you, my darling! Chief of Celestials!
Is there anywhere You can get away hence?

Note

Āḻvār to the Lord: "Unto me, who was steeped in ignorance, you revealed yourself and your excellence and worked me upto the present pitch, when I just cannot exist without you. Will it be just and proper for you to get parted from me, at this stage? As a matter of fact, you stepped on Mount Tiruvēṅkaṭam, only to get hold of this vassal. Even as you routed Rāvaṇa and his Laṅkā, you eradicated my conceit and arrogance. Even as you instilled confidence in Sugrīva, before slaying his brother, Vāli, by piercing the cluster of seven 'sāl' trees, with a single arrow, you whetted my love for you by exhibiting your auspicious traits. Having mingled with me, *in toto*, without reservation of any kind, how can you at all get parted from me hereafter and where else will you go?"

The fact of the matter is that the blending of the two is so perfect that they are no longer two separate entities but just a single entity.

pōkiṉṟa kālaṅkaḷ, pōya kālaṅkaḷ, pōku kālaṅkaḷ, tāy, tantai, [uyir
ākiṉṟāy! uṉṉai nāṉ aṭaintēṉ, viṭuvēṉō?
pākiṉṟa tol pukaḻ mūvulakukkum nātaṉē! paramā! taṉ
mēkiṉṟāy taṉ-tuḷay virai nāṟu kaṇṇiyaṉē! (II–6–10) [vēṅkaṭam

Translation

Having got you, shall I ever leave you, the Super-eminent?
Lord of all the three worlds, you grace Tiruvēṅkaṭam, the cool mount,
Cool tulacī garland of fragrance sweet you do sport,
Of eternal fame, far-reaching, You are unto me dear
As Father, Mother and Soul, at all times, past, present and future.

Notes

(i) *Lord to the Āḻvār*: "Well, you are asking me, not to leave you. But my anxiety is about you, whether you might

once again run away from me, struck down, by your feeling of lowliness. Please, therefore, assure me that you will not leave me and go".

Āḻvār to the Lord : Reply as in the stanza, above.

(ii) A doubt might be raised how the Āḻvār could talk about the benefits he would be receiving, in future, as well. Well, the Lord is the Sole Benefactor, at all times, past, present and future. After all, the present is itself, the future of the past and will, in turn, become the past of the future. Time-sequence makes no difference at all, the Lord being the constant Benefactor, at all times.

kaṉṉit taṉ am tuḻāy muṭik kamalat taṭam peruṅ kaṇṇaṉaip
naṉṉi, teṉ kurukūrc caṭakōpaṉ māṟaṉ coṉṉa [pukaḻ
eṉṉil cōrvu il antāti āyirattuḷ ivaiyum ōr pattu icaiyoṭum
paṇṇil pāṭa vallāravar kēcavaṉ tamarē. (II–6–11)

Translation

Those that sing tunefully these songs ten,
Out of the thousand composed by Kurukūr Caṭakōpaṉ
Scion of Māṟaṉ, singing the glory of the Lord, with large lotus-eyes,
Wearing on His crown the tulacī garland, cool and nice
Will join the rank and file of Kēcavaṉ's (the Lord's) devotees.

Note

The glory of the Lord, referred to here, in particular, is His boundless love (vyāmoha) for His devotees, like that shown unto the Āḻvār. To become His devotee, one has only to sing these ten songs, tunefully. Caste, creed and colour shall not stand in his/her way.

Second Centum—Seventh Decad (II-7) (Kēcavaṉ tamar)

Preamble

In the seventh stanza of the last decad, the Āḻvār had mentioned that the Lord's benevolent grace did not stop with him alone but overflowed its continents and extended to all those connected with

him in the preceding and succeeding generations as well. Overwhelmed by this extraordinary benevolence of the Lord the Āḻvār expatiates on it in this decad.

Of the numerous auspicious traits of the Lord extension of His love and care not only to His devotees but all those associated with them, is indeed exemplary.

After Rāvaṇa was slain by Śrī Rāma, Vibhīṣaṇa was called upon to perform the funeral rites of his brother. But then Vibhīṣaṇa demurred, saying that he would not do any such thing for such a great sinner as Rāvaṇa. Śrī Rāma (the very personification of Grace) had, however, no bitterness towards Rāvaṇa and all the bitterness was only on the part of Rāvaṇa, an one-sided affair! Now that Rāvaṇa was dead he would no longer repel Śrī Rāma's good offices, that is, if Vibhīṣaṇa performed the funeral rites at Śrī Rāma's bidding. If Vibhīṣaṇa still demurred and declined to act, Śrī Rāma would do it himself; if Vibhīṣaṇa was a brother unto Rāma, so was Rāvaṇa, as Vibhīṣaṇa's brother. There are several other instances where the Lord extended the area of His benevolence, bringing within its purview all those associated with His devotees. This is being illustrated in this Tiruvāymoḻi.

The Lord's twelve principal names, Keśava, Nārāyaṇa etc., are dealt with in these stanzas, in the same order in which these names are recited by the devotees in the course of their diurnal prayers. There are, therefore, 13 stanzas in this decad (12+1 end-song), as against the usual 11 stanzas (10+1 end-stanza).

kēcavaṉ tamar kīḻ mēl emar ēḻ eḻu piṟappum;
mā catir itu peṟṟu nammuṭai vāḻvu vaykkiṉṟavā!-
icaṉ, eṉ karumāṇikkam, eṉ ceṅkōlak kaṇṇaṉ, viṇṇōr–
nāyakaṉ, em pirāṉ, emmāṉ nārāyaṇaṉālē. (II–7–1)

Translation

My delectable blue gem, Master of all,
Of red-lotus-eyes lovely, Chief of the Celestials,
Nārāyaṇaṉ, my Lord and Benefactor has elevated
As *Kēcava's* (His) devotees, all with me associated,

Seven generations, up and down, how grand
Is the growth of our spiritual wealth indeed!

Notes

(i) 'Kēcava' yields three meanings, viz.:

(a) One with lovely locks of hair,

(b) Slayer of Kēśi, the demon—Śrī Kṛṣṇa and

(c) Progenitor of Brahmā and Śiva.

(ii) Reference to seven generations, up and down, follows the trend in the Vedic texts.

(iii) The spiritual growth resulting from the Lord's spontaneous grace is indeed astounding; the progress made by our own efforts will but be tiny in comparison.

nāraṇaṉ; muḻu ēḻ ulakukkum nātaṉ; vēta mayaṉ;
kāraṇam, kiricai, karumam, ivai mutalvaṉ; entai;
cīr aṇaṅku amarar piṟar palarum toḻutu ētta niṉṟu
vāraṇattai maruppu ocitta pirāṉ; eṉ mātavaṉē. (II–7–2)

Translation

Nāraṇaṉ, the Supreme support of all the worlds,
Does ordain everything, Cause, effect and action; the Vedās He pervades,
And is by the exalted Celestials and all else adored;
Mātavaṉ, who the giant tusker slew, is my beneficent Lord.

Notes

(i) 'Nārāyaṇa', as a *compound, brings out the meaning that the Lord is the In-dweller of all things and creatures having name and form:

(ii) The †compound of the word reveals the Lord as sustaining the whole universe.

* 'Bahuvrīhi'.
† 'Tatpuruṣa'.

(iii) 'Nāra' treats of the objects pervaded by the Lord; One aspect of '*ayana*' spotlights the Lord as the 'Means' and another aspect reveals Him as the 'End' as well.

(iv) Of the two meanings got at above, one emphasises the Lord's transcendence (paratva) and the other, His Saulabhya (Easy accessibility), vindicated principally through His Avatāras and the connected deeds.

mātavaṉ eṉṟatē koṇṭu, eṉṉai iṉi ippāl paṭṭatu
yātu avaṅkaḷum cērkoṭēṉ eṉṟu eṉṉuḷ pukuntu iruntu,
tītu avam keṭukkum amutam; centāmaraik kaṇ kuṉṟam;
kōtu avamil eṉ kaṉṉal-kaṭṭi; emmāṉ; eṉ kōvintaṉē. (II–7–3)

Translation

'Mātavaṉ' is a name by me casually uttered,
And yet, Kōvintaṉ my Lord, has inside me entered,
Ridding me of evils, one and all, the lotus-eyed Lord,
My nectar, Candy flawless, stands like a rock (firm and solid).

Notes

(i) 'Mādhava' is the Lord's name, most intimately associated with the Mother, Lakṣmī, meaning the 'Consort of Mā' and, for this reason, most endearing to Him. Śrī Parāśara Bhaṭṭar tells Goddess Raṅganāyaki, enshrined in Śrīraṅgam, that the Lord is dear to the devotees because of Her association with Him (Śloka 51 of Śrī guṇaratnakośam)

In aphorism 111 of 'Ācārya Hṛdayam', the learned author high-lights the Lord's extra-liberal standards by which He gives us credit for what is known as '*ajñāta sukṛta*' (hidden or unknown merit), such as a casual mention of the word 'Mādhava' by some one, being treated by the Lord as a pious recital of His name; a mechanical naming of the sacred mountain in the South, known as 'Tirumāliruñcōlai malai, as devout remembrance of the sacred pilgrim centre and so on.

(ii) Having eradicated all the sins of the Āḻvār, root and branch, the Lord is jubilant, a fact reflected in His

effulgent Person. The Lord is free from the twin flaws of (1) expecting anything in return from His beneficiaries and (2) doing good to the devotees for their sake instead of for His own benefit. The candy which we know of, is exposed to two kinds of flaws, namely, use of faulty ingredients and faulty preparation. But the Lord is a flawless candy, which attracted the Āḻvār and kept him wholly absorbed in it.

(iii) '*Govinda, my Lord*'—The Āḻvār thinks that the Lord incarnated as Kṛṣṇa, (Govinda), only to enthrall him.

kōvintaṉ kuṭakkūttaṉ, kōvalaṉ eṉṟu eṉṟē kuṉittut
tēvum taṉṉaiyum pāṭi āṭat tirutti, eṉṉaik koṇṭu, eṉ
pāvam-taṉṉaiyum pāṟak kaittu, emar ēḻ eḻu piṟappum
mēvum taṉmaiyam ākkiṉāṉ: vallaṉ empirāṉ viṭṭuvē. (II–7–4)

Translation

Kōvintaṉ, the pot-dancer, cowherd, the Supreme Lord,
So do I His glory sing and dance, by Him enthralled
And blest, my sins were chased out and those
With me connected for generations, recipients of His grace,
He has made; how potent is Viṣṇu, my benefactor great.

Notes

(i) The Āḻvār is lost in admiration of the immense prowess of Lord Viṣṇu, in redeeming him and placing him on a par with the Ever-free angels in Heaven (*Nitya Sūrīs*), a literal transformation of a base metal into gold. All his sins destroyed, he has been endowed with a mind steeped in the hilarious enjoyment of the Lord's glory. His amazing simplicity (*Saulabhya*) as Govinda and His transcendence (*Paratva*), side by side. And what more? All those connected with him, Seven generations, back and forth, have been blest likewise. They have been rendered worthy of His grace, looking upon Him as the Sole Refuge, true *to their essential nature*. Sage Vaśiṣṭa who accompanied Bharata to Chitrakūṭa to persuade Śrī Rāma to get back to Ayodhyā, told Śrī Rāma: 'ātmānam nāti vartetā' This literally means 'Don't exceed yourself'. Some interpret 'ātmānam' as Bharata, dear to Rāma like his own life. Śrī Parāśara Bhaṭṭar, however, interprets it as 'Don't exceed or give up your essential nature of doing the bidding of your devotees (āṣṛta pāratantṛya)'.

(ii) 'Govinda' has been repeated twice in Śrī Viṣṇu Sahasranāma, yielding two different meanings, viz. (i) The recipient of praise and (2) The redeemer of the Earth (hidden by an Asura). The better known meaning is one possessing cows. Śrī Kṛṣṇa was coronated as 'Govinda' by Devendra, after the former's glorious protection and preservation of the pastoral life of the whole community *in tact*, by holding aloft Mount Govardhana for a whole week. This is indeed a unique wealth acquired by the Lord, come down to Earth, which cannot be had even in the Eternal Land, Śrī Vaikuṇṭha.

(iii) *Pot-dancing*: Even as the affluent Brahmins resort to the performance of 'Yāgas', the Shepherds, in affluence, indulge in sports like pot-dance-with pots piled one over the other, on the head and both the shoulders. The dancers will throw up pots alternately using both hands, without disturbing the equilibrium of the piled-up pots. Lord Kṛṣṇa, as a member of the cowherd community, naturally participated in all such sports and revelled, rather excelled!

viṭṭu ilaṅku ceñcōtit tāmarai pātam, kaikaḷ, kaṇkaḷ;
viṭṭu ilaṅku karuñ cuṭar-malaiyē tiru uṭampu;
viṭṭu ilaṅku matiyam cīr caṅku; cakkaram pariti;
viṭṭu ilaṅku muṭi ammāṉ matucūtaṉaṉ-taṉakkē. (II–7–5)

Translation

Sporting the majestic crown, exceedingly bright,
My lord, Matucūtaṉ's eyes, hands and feet are very smart.
Like the lotus, red and broad; His body like blue mount Shines,
His Conch is like the Moon bright and His discus, a veritable Sun.

Note

Tirumālai Āṇṭāṉ told Rāmānuja that this song reveals how the Āḻvār was attracted to the Lord through the display of His exquisite personal charms and ascribed this interpretation to his Master, Śrī Āḷavantār (Yāmuṉa) Śrī Rāmānuja was unusually quiet and when asked by the Instructor whether he had nothing to say against, as he very often did, Śrī Rāmānuja signified his approval through his broad, bewitching smile. But Śrī Parāśara Bhaṭṭar would put it differently and say, "The song reveals the extra brilliance displayed by the Lord's person after making the Āḻvār and his associates His own". Whereas the former interpretation makes the Lord's personal charms the cause or instrument for wearing away the Āḻvār and bringing him into the Lord's fold, the latter shows it as the effect, the result of bringing the Āḻvār and his association unto the Lord's fold.

maturcūtaṉai aṉṟi maṟṟu ilēṉ eṉṟu ettālum kārumam iṉṟi,
tuti cūḻnta pāṭalkaḷ pāṭi āṭa niṉṟu, ūḻi ūḻitorum
etir cūḻal pukku, eṉaittōr piṟappum eṉakkē aruḷkaḷ ceyya
viti cūḻntatāl: eṉakkēl ammāṉ tirivikkiramaṉaiyē. (II–7–6)

Translation

In none but Matucūtan do I take refuge,
On and on I sing, as an end in itself, hymns of His glory;
This is because of Tirivikkiramaṉ's grace extraordinary,
Who took births alongside, to set me right, down the ages.

Note

The Āḻvār has passed through a staggering cycle of births. The Lord also incarnated every time, in order to get hold of the Āḻvār, but only now He could get hold of him and bring him up to the required standard. A pertinent question is asked at this stage as to why the Omnipotent Lord should not have grabbed at the Āḻvār straightaway if He was so keen on getting at him, instead of following such a tedious and time-absorbing process. No doubt, the Lord could have adopted the short-cut, suggested above, in His unbridled independence, for there is none to question Him. But an unreserved and unqualified amnesty would result in wholesale emancipation, *en masse*, which would cut across the very foundation of the Śāstras. The Lord is, therefore, on the look-out for some pretext or the other to reclaim the Subject through His extra-liberal standards. With this object, He also incarnated every time the Āḻvār was born but failed in His mission all along. Now, at long last, He has succeeded.

We can take it that this song reveals either the Lord's extreme grace or the Āḻvār's extreme humility.

tirivikkiramaṉ, centāmaraik kaṇ emmāṉ, eṉ ceṅkaṉi vāy
uruvil-polinta veḷḷaip paḷiṅku niṟattaṉaṉ eṉṟu eṉṟu uḷḷi,
paravip paṇintu pal ūḻi ūḻi niṉ pāta paṅkayamē
maruvit toḻum maṉamē tantāy: vallaikaṇ, eṉ vāmaṉaṉē.
(II–7–7)

Translation

Vāmaṉaṉ, my Lord, in just three strides you measured
The whole universe, as Tirivikkiramaṉ and in me ushered
A mind rivetted to your lotus feet, days on end adoring you,
My red lotus-eyed Master with sparkling teeth, how capable of you!

Notes

(1) *Āḻvār to the Lord*: How capable of you, how gracious! you have endowed me with a mind which adores You and sings your glory all the time as an end in itself.

(2) Śrī Nampiḷḷai has it that it was not a case of reconditioning the Āḻvār's mind so as to make it God-bent but one of fitting him with a new mind altogehter, one picked out from the Lord's strong room where valuables are stored up.

vāmaṉaṉ! eṉ marakata vaṇṇaṉ! tāmaraik kaṇṇiṉaṉ!
kāmaṉaip payantāy! eṉṟu eṉṟu uṉ kaḻal pāṭiyē paṇintu,
tū maṉattaṉaṉāyp piṟavit tuḻati niṅka, eṉṉait
tī maṉam keṭuttāy; uṉakku eṉ ceykēṉ? eṉ ciritaraṉē. (II–7–8)

Translation

Oh, Ciritaraṉ, My Lord, You redeemed my foul mind
And rid me of life's miseries, and now with a mind pure,
I worship Your feet, Sing and adore you as the Sire
Of Kāmaṉ, Vāmaṉaṉ, my lotus-eyed Lord, the emerald mount
And so on; (this great good of Yours) how can I recompense?

Notes

(i) The Lord is referred to as the Father of Kāmaṉ (Manmatha), because He begot through Rukmiṇī Devī, a Son by name Pradhyumna of exquisite beauty, said to be an 'Amśa' or incarnation of Manmatha, the minor-deity inducing amorous love.

(ii) What was the Āḻvār's mind like before it was redeemed? Śrī Nampiḷḷai says that it was hardly fit for reconditioning, as such, erratic like the one going in for ambrosia as well as poison, feeling attracted towards God as well as the petty pleasures of the sensual world. The Lord's grace has now operated in two ways, namely, bestowal of a mind solely rivetted to the Lord's lotus feet after throwing away the *erstwhile mind*, damned beyond redemption.

ciritaraṉ, ceyya tāmaraik kaṇṇaṉ eṉṟu eṉṟu, irāppakal vāy
verii, alamantu kaṇkaḷ nīr malki, vevvuyirttu uyirttu,
marliya tīviṉai māḷa, iṉpam vaḷara, vaikal vaikal
irii, uṉṉai eṉṉuḷ vaittaṉai; eṉ iruṭikēcaṉē! (II–7–9)

Translation

My (Lord) Iruṭikēcaṉ, how gracious of You indeed!
Lodged in me, every moment my joy you expand,
Having rid me of all my erstwhile sins dense;
Day and night, with hot tears in my rolling eyes,
I kept crying, Oh, Ciritaraṉ, Oh, lotus-eyed,

Note

Āḻvār to the Lord:

"I was crying out for you all the time, with tears welling up my eyes, breathing hot, but all my erstwhile miseries you

have now irrevocably cut out so that I go on enjoying you, and my joy grows by leaps and bounds every moment".

Well, this is the interpretation, current from the days of Śrī Parāśara Bhaṭṭar who gave out this meaning. The earlier preceptors held that the Lord cut out the dense sins of the Āḻvār and made him cry out in ecstasy the Lord's names with tearful eyes, day and night, breathing hot, besides promoting this God-love of his every moment.

iruṭikēcaṉ, em pirāṉ ilaṅkai arakkar kulam
muruṭu tīrtta pirāṉ, emmāṉ, amarar pemmāṉ eṉṟu eṉṟu
teruṭiyākil, neñcē! vaṇaṅku; tiṇṇam aṟi; aṟintu,
maruṭiyēlum viṭēl kaṇṭāy! nampi-paṟpanāpaṉaiyē. (II–7–10)

Translation

My mind, if in you there's any clarity left,
Worship my Lord, Iruṭikēcaṉ, Chief of celestials aloft;
Know for certain and act, He is our Benefactor great,
Who rid Laṅkā of its tough rākśasa clan,
Shrink not from Him still, unto Paṟpanāpaṉ, the perfect, hold on.

Notes

(i) By addressing his mind in this manner the Āḻvār was only disclosing to the Lord his firm hold on Him.

(ii) Slaying the ten-headed Rāvaṇa is on a par with the redemption of the Āḻvār's mind which, aided by the five motororgans and five sense-organs, was holding fiendish sway over him, launched into the Sea of Samsāra. Śrī Nampiḷḷai likens the bestowal, on the Āḻvār, of a God-bent mind free from the devilish clutches of the senses in lieu of his erstwhile foul mind, to the destruction of Rāvaṇa and installation of Vibhīṣaṇa on the throne of Laṅkā.

(iii) The Āḻvār says unto his mind: "How can you, my mind, get out of the ken of Padmanābha, the perfect Lord with all auspicious attributes, and come to grief? The

Lord is perfect in every respect, You know, His attributes, His form exquisite and His benefaction unto us".

paṟpanāpaṉ, uyarvu aṟa uyarum perum tiṟalōṉ;
eṟparaṉ eṉṉai ākkik koṇṭu, eṉakkē taṉṉait tanta
kaṟpakam; eṉ amutam; kār mukil pōlum vēṅkaṭa nal
veṟpaṉ; vicumpōr pirāṉ; entai tāmōtaraṉē. (II-7-11)

Translation

On Paṟpanāpaṉ's navel sprouted the lotus
Whence all worlds came, of matchless prowess,
And in me wholly absorbed, He is the '*Kaṟpaka*' tree,
That yielded me and then gave itself unto me;
Chief of Celestials, Vēṅkaṭam is His favourite abode, He's my nectar,
The cloud-hued Lord, Tāmōtaraṉ is my loving Master,

Notes

(i) The Āḻvār says that the Supreme Lord, with none above Him, is also the humblest; having made the Āḻvār His vassal, the Lord is wholly absorbed in him, making it appear that He knows no one else.

(ii) The '*Kaṟpaka*' tree is the legendary wish-yielding tree. Even as there is a vast gulf between the Lord's attributes and the comparable material in each case, the Lord, taken as the '*Kaṟpaka*' tree, differs from it in the following essential respects:

(*a*) the supplicant is also the Lord's creation;
(*b*) the Supplicant gets absorbed in the Lord;
(*c*) the supplicant gets not only all that he wants but gets the Lord Himself, who is thus the extraordinary tree, giving itself to the Seeker; and
(*d*) the Lord Himself becomes the object of enjoyment by His devotees.

tāmōtaraṉai, taṉi mutalvaṉai, ñālam uṇṭavaṉai
āmō taram aṟiya oruvarkku? eṉṟē toḻum avarkaḷ
tāmōtaraṉ uru ākiya civaṟkum ticaimukaṟkum
āmō taram aṟiya-emmāṉai eṉ āḻi vaṇṇaṉaiyē. (II-7-12)

Translation

Tāmōtaraṉ, my peerless, primordial Lord,
Of oceanic hue, who devoured all the worlds,
Even exalted Ticaimukaṉ (Brahmā) and Civaṉ cannot scan and comprehend,
Though on His person they stay and worship Him
And venture to think that they can His glory fathom.

Note

The Lord cannot be comprehended through one's own effort by any one, including the exalted Brahmā and Śiva, although they stay right on His body and are inclined to be presumptuous, venturing to attempt the impossible. But He is fully comprehended by the Āḻvār and devotees like him to whom the Lord has, on His own, vouchsafed all that knowledge, clear and concise, full and complete. The Lord who is the causeless cause, the Progenitor of the entire Universe, combines in Him the triple aspects unknown to many, namely, (1) He is the vassal of His devotees, (2) He is the originator of the Universe and (3) the friend-in-need, succouring one and all, in times of distress. Even the Āḻvār cannot fully comprehend the many favours done to him by the Lord, although one so great, had disclosed to the Āḻvār, so low, the vast array of His oceanic traits, like compressing an ocean inside the tiny mustard.

vaṇṇa mā maṇic cōtiyai, amarar talaimakaṉai,
kaṇṇaṉai, neṭumālait teṉ kurukūrc caṭakōpaṉ
paṇṇiya tamiḻ-mālai āyirattuḷ ivai paṉṉiraṇṭum
paṇṇil paṉṉiru nāmap pāṭṭu aṇṇal-tāḷ aṇaivikkumē. (II-7-13)

Translation

These tuneful songs on the Lord's twelve names, numbering a dozen,
Out of the thousand Tamil hymns yielded by Teṉkurukūr Caṭakōpaṉ,
Setting out the love, intense and unlimited, of Kaṇṇaṉ,

Lustrous like the blue gem grand, Chief of *Amarars* (celestials)
(Unto His devotees), will unto the Sire's feet bind (the chanters).

Note

In this end-stanza, the Lord's love, intense and unlimited, for His devotees is emphasised. This provides the impetus for the Lord looking upon His devotees as His sole objects of enjoyment. Contact with this decad (Tiruvāymoḷi) is enough to render one, such a beloved devotee of Lord Kēcavaṉ.

Second Centum—Eighth decad (II-8)
(Aṇaivatu Aravu-aṇaimēl)

Preamble

In the last decad, the Āḷvār was overwhelmed by the Lord's extraordinary benevolence which did not stop with him alone but overflowed its continents and extended to those connected with him, seven generations, back and forth. In other words, the heavenly bliss enjoyed by the '*Nityās*' in Heaven could be shared by him and his associates, right here. In his boundless compassion for the suffering humanity, caught up in the vortex of worldly life and sensual pleasures, the Āḷvār would naturally like to seize this golden opportunity and get the area of benevolence extended, by getting the '*Samsāris*' (worldlings) also associated with him as fellow-devotees. And so, he turns round and advises them to get into the Divine fold, seeing that the Lord is the one and only granter of Mokṣa, the final bliss, ridding them of the terrific involvement in worldly life, with its dreadful cycle of birth and death. It may be recalled that, once before, vide I-2, the Āḷvār addressed the fellow-beings with whom he wished to share all that exalted knowledge about the Divine order, imparted to him by a self-revealing God.

The earlier Ācāryas had held that, in this decad, the Āḷvār propagates the Lord's Supremacy. But Śrī Parāśara Bhaṭṭar was inclined to think that the Lord's prowess of granting 'Mokṣa' is being talked about in this decad. As a matter of fact, the Lord's Supremacy has been dealt with in this very centum, in the Second decad, and there is no need to repeat it here so soon. Further, this decad is replete with expressions relating to the grant of Mokṣa.

In any case, it makes no difference either way, as God-head ('*Īśvara-tva*) and the prerogative of granting Mokṣa (*Mokṣa-pradatva*) go hand in hand, vested solely in the Supreme Lord.

Towards the end of this decad, as can be seen from stanza ten, the Āḷvār, however, feels frustrated by the unresponsive world around, jogging on in just the same way as before, all his advice having fallen on deaf ears, like the advice tendered by Mālyavāṉ and others to Rāvaṇa. The Āḷvār would, therefore, profitably revert to the enjoyment of the Lord as before, which got interrupted for a while because of his misplaced sympathy for those around, totally impervious to his wholesome advice. At the same time, it was no mean consolation for him that, in the process, he escaped getting contaminated by them and becoming one of them. Great indeed is his jubilation that he could still retain, *in tact*, the priceless wealth of God-love and God-enjoyment, like that of a person who clears a dacoit-infested area without being robbed and molested.

aṇaivatu aravu-aṇaimēl; pūmpāvai ākam
puṉarvatu; iruvar avar mutalum tāṉē;
iṇaivaṉ ām ep poruṭkum; viṭu mutal ām—
puṇaivaṉ piṟavikkaṭal nīntuvārkkē. (II–8–1)

Translation

The Supreme Lord who does on serpent-bed repose
And hold Pūmpāvai (Lakṣmī, the lotus-born) in embrace
Is Progenitor of them both (Brahmā and Śiva); He freely descends
Among all and sundry, Granter of Mokṣa, the raft (sure and certain)
He is, to swim across (Samsāra) the difficult and dreadful ocean.

Notes

(i) This stanza is an epitome of the contents of this decad.

(ii) The first two lines of the stanza bring out the setting in the Eternal land of absolute bliss (*Nitya Vibhūti*). So far as the "*Līla Vibhūti* (Sportive Universe) is concerned, the Lord is depicted as the originator of one and all, including those two calling for special attention, the

exalted Brahmā and Rudra and yet He incarnates among all and sundries, as if He is of their own species and mingles with them freely.

Being the granter of Mokṣa, He is the raft, safe and sound, to get hold of for those who are keen on crossing the ocean of 'Samsāra' with its terrific involvement in the cycle of birth and death and seek His help, finding that, by themselves, they can hardly cross this ocean, vast and deep.

nīntum tuyarp piṟavi uṭpaṭa maṟṟu ev evaiyum
nīntum; tuyar illā vīṭu mutal ām:
pūn taṉ puṉal-poykai yāṉai iṭar kaṭinta
pūn taṉ-tuḻāy eṉ taṉi nāyakaṉ puṇarppē. (II–8–2)

Translation

Contact with my unique Lord, wearing tulacī garland
Cool and nice, the Redeemer of the elephant,
In great distress, in the cool and lovely pond,
Will help to ford "Samsāra', the dreadful ocean,
The breeder of all ills and attain the blissful heaven.

Notes

(i) In this stanza, the Āḻvār says that the Lord, as such, is not necessary for the attainment of Mokṣa and some kind of contact with Him will suffice. Such a contact will help one both ways, namely, obtaining relief from the otherwise incurable maladies of birth etc, and attaining the 'Eternal Land' of absolute bliss without the slightest tinge of sorrow.

(ii) Swimming across the ocean of *Samsāra* is a never-ending process; if the ocean is interminably vast, the swimming also is interminably long, a perennial process. It is only the Lord's redemptive grace flowing through contact with Him, in some form, that will cut the gordian knot and take one out of this otherwise unfordable ocean.

puṇarkkum ayaṉ ām; aḻikkum araṉ ām;
puṇartta taṉ untiyoṭu ākattu maṉṉi:
puṇartta tiruākit taṉ mārvil tāṉ cēr
puṇarppaṉ perum puṇarppu eṅkum pulaṉē. (II–8–3)

Translation

The Lord is (also) 'Ayaṉ' who from His navel emerged
And created the worlds, on His person duly lodged,
And 'Araṉ', the destroyer too; on His winsome chest
There's Tiru; perceptible indeed are His herculean tasks many.

Note

The Supreme Lord not only discharges the functions of 'Ayaṉ' (Brahmā), the Creator and 'Araṉ' (Śiva), the destroyer, standing within them as their Internal Controller but also assigns specific portions of His body for their occupation. And then, there is 'Tiru' (Lakṣmī), inseparably lodged on His winsome chest. And then, He reposes on the vast expanse of water, contemplating the ensuing creation of the universe. The herculean deeds performed by Him through Brahmā and Rudra and on His own, are most perceptible indeed.

pulaṉ aintu mēyum poṟi aintum nīṅki,
nalam antam illatu ōr nāṭu pukuvīr!
alamantu vīya acuraraic ceṟṟāṉ
palam muntu cīril paṭimiṉ ōvātē. (II–8–4)

Translation

Those of you who the interplay want to quell,
Of the senses and sense-objects, so as to enter
The Eternal Land of perfect bliss, will do well
To enjoy the traits auspicious of the Lord, for ever;
How He tortured and slew the Asuras, think it over.

Notes

(i) Here is the Āḻvār's recipe for discarding the sensual pleasures, petty and transient, and entering the Eternal Land of perfect bliss:

"Be steeped in the enjoyment of His auspicious traits for ever".

(ii) Unlike several other processes which are difficult and tiresome in the initial stages and are pleasurable only in the final stages of fruition, contemplation of the Lord's auspicious traits is an ecstatic experience, right from the beginning. It is also noteworthy that there are no inhibitions and injunctions restricting such enjoyment to certain days only or parts of the day as in the case of sea-bath etc.

(iii) This abode of ours is the harrowing land of eternal miseries whereas the Heaven is just the opposite—the Eternal Land of absolute bliss. The Āḻvār does not subscribe to the doctrine of philosophy which conceives of 'Mokṣa', as but the mere disembodiment of the soul on emancipation from the cycle of births and deaths. His concept of 'Mokṣa' is the eternal joy of constant service unto the Lord, in the yonder heaven, with no tinge of the erstwhile sorrows, partaking of the bliss of unlimited dimensions, fresh and exquisite, every moment, flowing from the Lord who is an inexhaustible fountain of bliss.

(iv) The Lord will destroy our sins and remove all impediments in the way of our union with Him, even as He tormented and destroyed the Asuras.

ōvāt tuyarp piṟavi uṭpaṭa maṟṟu ev evaiyum
mūvāt taṉi mutalāy mūvulakum kāvalōṉ,
mā āki, āmai āy, miṉ āki, māṉiṭam ām–
tēvāti tēva perumāṉ eṉ tīrttaṉē. (II–8–5)

Translation

The Supreme Lord, the causeless cause of the flowing universe,
Its creation, sustentation and destruction, Chief of the Celestials,
My Tīrttaṉ (Who sanctified me) did come down as a Horse,
Tortoise, Fish and Man, and protected the worlds, one and all.

Note

The routine of the Universe falling under the three major compartments of creation, preservation and dissolution, goes on uninterruptedly because of the ever-alert and omnipotent Lord who directs and controls them all. No doubt, He dowered on all of us, limbs and sense-organs to put us on a career of gainful activity with a view to attaining Him, but even if we stray away from Him He is such an indefatigable cultivator who doesn't lose heart when the yield is low or next to nothing, but goes on with His cultivation, hoping for better days. That is why He takes all the trouble to incarnate in various forms and goes on with His work of resuscitation.

tīrttaṉ ulaku aḷanta cēvaṭimēl pūntāmam
cērtti, avaiyē civaṉ muṭimēl tāṉ kaṇṭu,
pārttaṉ teḷintoḻinta paintuḻāyāṉ perumai
pērttum oruvarāl pēcak kiṭantatē? (II–8–6)

Translation

Is there any need at all for others to deliberate
The glory of (Lord Kṛṣṇa) wearing tulacī garland, Tīrttaṉ (The Immaculate),
At whose lovely feet which spanned the Universe, Pārttaṉ placed a garland
And saw it (a little later) on Śiva's head, getting clarity of mind?

Note

In the battle against the "Kauravas", Arjuṉa needed the weapon known as 'Pāśupada astra' which could be had from Śiva after due propitiation. The compassionate Kṛṣṇa, however, told Arjuṉa the short-cut whereby he could offer at the former's feet the garland intended for Paśupati (Śiva). Arjuṉa did accordingly and that very night, Śiva appeared in Arjuṉa's dream, wearing that very same garland on the head and presented the weapon in question. Reference has been made, in this song, to the spanning of the whole Universe by the Lord as it was then that Brahmā washed the Lord's feet to the accompaniment of Vedic chantings, and the sacred water that flowed down the Lord's feet was held by Śiva on his head (Nāṉmukaṉ Tiruvantāti-9). Is there at all any need to dispute the self-evident glory of Lord Kṛṣṇa?

kiṭantu iruntu, ninṟu, aḷantu, kēḻal āy, kīḻp pukku
iṭantiṭum; tannuḷ karakkum; umiḻum;
taṭam perun tōḷ ārat taḻuvum; pār ennum
maṭantaiyai māl ceykinṟa māl ār kāṇpārē? (II-8-7)

Translation

Lying, sitting and standing, measuring the worlds,
Getting into the waters deep and lifting up the Earth,
As the Boar gigantic, holding with Him all the worlds
And then spitting them out, embracing dame Earth
On His broad shoulders complacent, who can comprehend His love for Mother earth?

Notes

(i) Many indeed are the wondrous deeds of the Lord, done out of His great love for Mother Earth, the Sportive universe (*Līlā vibhūti*).

(ii) *Lying, sitting and standing*:

There are several ways of appreciating these postures of the Lord. These are set out below:

(*a*) *Reclining* on the Milk-ocean, the centre of creative activity, surrounded by the band of celestials;

Sitting on the serpent couch in the High Heaven; and *standing* firm on Mount Tiruvēṅkaṭam, His favourite resort.

(*b*) *Lying* prostrate in front of the Ocean, Śrī Rāma's supplication to the king of the ocean;

Sitting (Staying) in the Āśramas of the Mahaṛṣis during His exile;

and *standing* victorious at the gates of Laṅkā after slaying Rāvaṇa (may also refer to Śrī Rāma standing victorious after slaying vāli).

(*c*) *Lying* in the pilgrim centre known as Puḷiṅkuṭi.
Sitting in the pilgrim centre known as Varakuṇamaṅkai.

and *Standing* in the pilgrim centre known as *Śrīvaikuṇṭam.*

(*a*) above refers to the Lord's transcendent glory;

(*b*) above refers to the Lord's 'Saulabhya' (easy accessibility) in His Incarnate form,

(*c*) refers to the Lord's iconic manifestation in these different postures in the respective pilgrim centres. See also notes under V-10-6.

kāṇpār ār em īcan kaṇṇanai? en kāṇumāṟu?
ūṇ pēcil, ellā ulakum ōr tuṟṟu āṟṟā:
cēṇ pāla vīṭō, uyirō, maṟṟu ep poruṭkum
ēṇ pālum cōrān, parantu uḷan ām eṅkumē. (II-8-8)

Translation

Who can comprehend Kaṇṇan, my Lord
Or get at the know-how? hardly a morsel
Of His food can all the worlds be, His abode
Is high above the worlds, Inner Controller of all,
Indeed He pervades all over
With no exception whatever.

Notes

(i) It is indeed impossible for any one to gauge the full extent of the Lord's glory; even the exalted ones who are endowed with the capacity to delve into it, are not equal to the task. They too could touch only a fringe of it, just a peep, and no more.

(ii) All along, reference was made to the Lord containing within His stomach, eating up all the worlds, during the period of deluge, making it appear to be a herculean task of gigantic magnitude. Now, it will be seen that all the worlds put together hardly constitute a morsel of food for the Lord, a mere fleebite.

eṅkum uḷan kaṇṇan enṟa makaṉaik kāyntu,
iṅku illaiyāl enṟu iraṇiyan tūṇ puṭaippa,
aṅku appoḻutē avan vīyat tōnṟiya en
ciṅkap pirān perumai ārāyum cīrmaittē? (II-8-9)

Translation

The son affirmed, ' Kaṇṇaṉ is everywhere ',
Shouted back irate Iraṇiyaṉ, " If he be not here? "
And slapped the pillar hard; there and then
The Lord appeared and killed the demon;
Indeed, my Naraciṅka's glory is beyond deliberation.

Notes

(i) In the preceding Song, the Lord's immanence was referred to. Perhaps, it didn't carry conviction with quite a few persons who doubted whether the Lord could pervade all over, in and out. This song is evidently addressed to those persons, warning them not to follow in the foot-steps of Hiraṇya and come to grief.

(ii) Hiraṇya slapped, with his own hand, a pillar built under his own supervision. There was, therefore, hardly any question of magic or sleight of hand which produced the furious Narasiṅga, right from the bosom of that very pillar, from the very spot on which Hiraṇya slapped that very moment. The points to be pondered over in this context are: Had the Lord not appeared from the crucial spot tapped by Hiraṇya or if His appearance had been delayed by even a split second, His immanence at all places and at all times would be open to question. His omnipresence having been established, His omnipotence needs to be demonstrated. If it is said that Narasiṅga was born, He was not born in the generally accepted sense of impregnation, birth, growth and all that. He jumped out of the ripped-open pillar, as a full- grown adult, a peculiar combination of Man and Lion, more than a match for the formidable Hiraṇya. Strange indeed were the boons conferred on Hiraṇya by Brahmā—the devil was not to meet with death at the hands of a male, female or a hermophrodite, neither by Gods nor by man or beast or any of the five elements, neither by day nor by night, neither in space nor on the ground, neither inside the house nor outside, so on and so forth. The Strange Visitor who sprang forth engaged Hiraṇya, in a *hand to hand fight*, dragged him

on to the *door-step*, laid him on His *lap* and tore open his bowels with the *finger nails* (spear-like claws), at *dusk*. Hiraṇya, the seemingly impregnable fortress, armed in a thousand and one ways against every conceivable source of danger, crashed, at long last, before the superior might of the Omnipotent Lord. The words in italics, as above, will show that none of the boons granted to Hiraṇya was violated.

cīrmai koḷ viṭu cuvarkkam naraku īṟā,
īrmai koḷ tēvar naṭuvā, maṟṟu ep poruṭkum
vēr mutal āy, vittu āy, parantu taṉi niṉṟa
kār mukilpōl vaṇṇaṉ, eṉ kaṇṇaṉai nāṉ kaṇṭēṉē. (II–8–10)

Translation

Seen have I kaṇṇaṉ, my cloud-hued Lord, of unique excellence,
All pervading, He is the triple cause of all existence,
Ushering in the exalted Heaven, Svarg and hell, the respective denizens,
The kind-hearted Devas and all else.

Notes

(i) As already mentioned in the preamble to this decad, the Āḻvār finds, at this stage, the people around, most unresponsive, all his advice having fallen on deaf ears. Frustrated though, he is still happy that he didn't get contaminated by them and become one of them, very much like clearing a dacoit-infested area without getting robbed or molested.

(ii) The Lord combines in Himself all the three causes of existence, the *material* (upādāna) *Instrumental* (Sahakāri) and the *operative* (nimitta) causes. For making pots, mud is the material cause, the potter's wheel and staff, the Instrumental cause, and the Potter is the operative cause. So far as the creation of this world is concerned, all the three causes vest in the Lord, yet another unique feature of the Lord. Apart from this universal aspect, the Lord regales the denizens of the high heaven with the exquisite charm of His transcendent Form, and

He has now chosen to present Himself unto the Āḻvār as the charming Kṛṣṇa. Great indeed is the Āḻvār's joy.

kaṇ-talaṅkaḷ ceyya karu mēṉi ammāṉai
vaṇṭu alampum cōlai vaḻuti vaḷa nāṭaṉ
paṇ-talaiyil coṉṉa tamiḻ āyirattu ip pattum valār
viṇ-talaiyil vīṟṟiruntu āḷvar em mā vīṭē. (II–8–11)

Translation

Those that learn these songs ten
Out of the thousand composed in choice tunes,
By (Caṭakōpaṉ), Chief of Vaḻutināṭu, abounding in fertile orchards,
Where go gay honey bees in their swarms,
Adoring the black-hued, large lotus-eyed Lord,
Will in high Heaven flourish and partake of bliss supreme.

Note

The chanters of this decad will shoot up from the harrowing depths of worldly existence to an exalted position in heaven, keeping at their beck and call, the denizens over there.

Second Centum—Ninth decad (II-9)
(Em mā viṭṭu)

Preamble

This decad pinpoints the concept of '*Puruṣārtha*' the ultimate value of the final goal of every individual. In the preceding decad, frequent references were made by the Āḻvār to the Eternal Land of absolute bliss. On hearing these, the Lord thought He would rather put the Āḻvār in Heaven if that was all His desire and accordingly told him, "Well, you can have the Mokṣa, as desired". It is now and here that the position gets crystallised. The Āḻvār revolves in his mind and concludes that any thing granted by the Lord, by way of catering to his desire instead of His own, is not worth having, and even heaven attained this way, would be little better than hell. The real '*Puruṣārtha*', or ultimate value

lies in whatever is bestowed by the Lord out of His own free grace and liking. And so, the Āḻvār speaks out his mind, as follows:

"My Lord, it makes absolutely no difference to me whether I am in heaven as the partaker of the endless bliss there or in the state of *Kaivalya*, lost in self-enjoyment or get consigned to the gloomy abyss, if it is all your sweet will and dispensation. On the other hand, I will not hesitate to decline even the gift of heaven, if it is bestowed on me just for my gratification. And so, may it please you to so ordain my goal as to make it coincide solely with your desire". Here is a clear enunciation of the paramountcy of the Lord's will, in total subjugation of the egoistic compulsions of the Individual. It is indeed very hard to find the Subject who can appreciate and fall in line with the Āḻvār's lofty train of thought, totally bereft of egoistic impulses and putting his whole weight on the Lord. It was for this very reason that Empār, the great preceptor, is said to have screened his audience and closed the gates of the lecture hall before discoursing on this decad.

em mā viṭṭut tiṟamum ceppam; niṉ
cem mā pāta-paṟput talai cērttu; ollai
kaimmā tuṉpam kaṭinta pirāṉē!
ammā! aṭiyēṉ vēṇṭuvatu ītē. (II–9–1)

Translation

You relieved the distress of an elephant, benevolent Lord!
If you'd only soon set your grand lotus feet red
On my head, the topic of high heaven I shall not moot,
Sire, this is all I pray for, nothing more do I want.

Note

Right in the beginning of this song, the Āḻvār makes his position abundantly clear. He shall no longer mention about the high heaven, be it a matter of assuming a form like unto that of God (Sārūpya), staying in the same area as the seat of the Lord's kingdom in heaven (sālokya) etc. All that he needs is that the Lord should set His lovely pair of red lotus feet on his head.

itē yāṉ uṉṉaik koḷvatu eññāṉṟum; eṉ
mai tōy cōti maṇivaṇṇa! entāy!
eytā niṉ kaḻal yāṉ eyta ñāṉak
kai tā; kālak kaḻivu ceyyēlē. (II–9–2)

Translation

My lovely Lord, lustrous like the dark blue gem,
All that I pray unto you now and at all times,
Is that you do lend me the hand of wisdom,
To reach your feet, difficult to attain, with no loss of time.

Notes

(i) In the preceding song, the Āḻvār had categorically stated that he wanted nothing more than the Lord's lovely pair of lotus feet being set firmly on his head. And yet, the Lord tempts the Āḻvār and asks him whether he would want anything more. The Āḻvār, however, stands his ground, all right and reaffirms that he wants nothing else.

Lord : Well, how long will you persevere in this attitude?"

Āḻvār : "As long as you and I exist".

Lord : "What made you so steadfast?"

Āḻvār : "Your exquisite charm".

Lord : "And what should I do now?"

Āḻvār : "Pray, deign to make this vassal, your sole dependent, get at your lovely pair of feet, difficult to attain".

(ii) About the lending of the hand of wisdom, here is an anecdote, very instructive.

Mutaliyāṇṭāṉ and Empār were colleagues and co-disciples of Śrī Rāmānuja. During a fairly long spell of absence of the former from Śrīraṅgam, a disciple of his stayed with Empār. One of those days, quite a few disciples of Empār were administered by him the five-fold sacraments enjoined for Śrī vaiṣṇavas. The aforesaid disciple of Mutaliyāṇṭāṉ also got the sacraments from Empār along with the others. To an enquiry by Empār, whether the disciple in question had spiritual relationship with any other Preceptor, the answer was assuring enough and indicated that there was no other spiritual mentor. But then, when Mutaliyāṇṭāṉ returned to Śrīraṅgam, this particular disciple went back to him, and served him as before. When Empār got to know of this, he hurried to Mutaliyāṇṭāṉ and expressed regret for the administration of the Sacraments to the disciple in question during Āṇṭāṉ's absence from the station. But Āṇṭāṉ's magnanimity put Empār at ease, in no time. The former observed: "If two persons stretch out their hands to one fallen into a well, it is so much the easier both for the riser and the raisers". The helping hand, in this case, refers to the spiritual knowledge imparted by both the preceptors.

ceyyēl tīviṉai eṉṟu aruḷ ceyyum eṉ
kai ār cakkarak kaṇṇa-pirāṉē!
ai ār kaṇṭam aṭaikkilum, niṉ kaḻal
eyyātu ētta aruḷcey eṉakkē. (II–9–3)

Translation

Kaṇṇā, my benefactor, wielding the discus bright,
'Tis your grace that I from evil deeds desist;
Bless me that I shall adore, without respite,
Your comely feet even when phlegm chokes my throat tight.

Note

Āḻvār to the Lord: "I pray not for relief from sufferings but for a mind rivetted to your feet at all times, even in those dark moments when the throat gets choked by phlegm".

C.f. the 12th Jitante śloka (recited at the conclusion of the worship of the household Deity)

Which means:

"Whatever calamities might befall me, let not my mind be apart from you; this would be enough to salve me".

eṉakkē āṭcey ek kālattum eṉṟu, eṉ
maṉakkē vantu iṭaivītu iṉṟi maṉṉi,
taṉakkē āka eṉaik koḷḷum itē:
eṉakkē kaṇṇaṉai yāṉ koḷ ciṟappē. (II–9–4)

Translation

The greatest good I desire from Kaṇṇaṉ, my Lord,
True to my essential nature, is that command He shall,
That I serve Him wholly and at all times, and own He shall
Me as His exclusive vassal, in my mind firmly lodged.

Notes

(i) This song is the quintessence of this decad, determining, as it does, the greatest good for the individual soul, in keeping with its essential nature, namely, abject dependence on the Lord as His exclusive vassal for all time. For abiding in such a state without the slightest aberration at any time, the Āḷvār seeks the Lord's Grace.

(ii) Śrī Nampiḷḷai appreciates this decad as the most outstanding, of all the hundred decads (Tiruvāymoḷis) and even so, this song is the best, in this decad. That is because the Āḷvār prays unto the Lord that He should stay inside him, firm and for ever, and take from him service, service exclusively unto Him and at all times, rendered solely for His pleasure, eschewing the slightest tinge of personal egoism, absolutely selfless like the Moon, Southerly breeze, sandal paste and water.

(iii) In the learned assembly presided over by Empār, Piḷḷai Tirunarayūr Arayar enquired why the Āḷvār, endowed with full and complete knowledge, clear and concise, should at all make a request of this kind to the Lord, instead of resigning himself wholly to His grace, leaving Him to do whatever He liked. While agreeing with the Arayar that it was a pertinent question, Empār elucidated that it was the innate charm of the destined goal, namely, selfless service unto the Lord for His exclusive enjoyment that drew the Āḷvār out in this manner and made him long for it, even as the Divine Mother,

inseparably poised on the Lord's winsome chest, keeps on saying, "I shall not get parted from my Lord even for a trice".

ciṟappil vītu cuvarkkam narakam
iṟappil eytuka, eytaṟka; yāṉum
piṟappu il pal piṟavip perumāṉai,
maṟappu oṉṟu iṉṟi, eṉṟum makiḻvaṉē. (II–9–5)

Translation

Let me or let me not go, after death,
To the renowned heaven, the svarg or the hell,
But may I meditate upon the Lord, Who, though free from birth,
Chooses to take many a birth, in an unbroken spell,
Forgetting Him at no time and thus be full of mirth.

Note

The Āḷvār's sole concern is to remain steeped for ever in the enjoyment of the Lord's wondrous deeds and auspicious traits, displayed during the numerous incarnations taken at His sweet volition.

makiḻ koḷ teyvam, ulōkam, alōkam,
makiḻ koḷ cōti malarnta ammāṉē!
makiḻ koḷ cintai col ceykai koṇṭu eṉṟum
makiḻvuṟṟu uṉṉai vaṇaṅka vārāyē. (II–9–6)

Translation

Oh, Lord, from You blossomed the mirthful Moon and the Sun resplendent,
The blissful Celestials, mankind with Knowledge radiant,
The fauna and flora with no such radiance, pray appear before me
That I may worship you ever, by word, deed and thought gaily.

Note

Āḷvār to the Lord: My Lord, you made the celestials, full of bliss, the mankind, radiant with knowledge, the luminous

Sun and Moon as well as the non-sentient beings, devoid of knowledge. You, who could create this Kaleidoscopic Universe, can surely make me enjoy you wholly, by word, deed and thought and, for this purpose, you should be before me, at all times.

vārāy! un tirup pāta malarkkiḻp
pērātē yāṉ vantu aṭaiyumpaṭi:
tārātāy! uṉṉai yeṉṉuḷ vaippil eṉṟum
ārātāy! eṉakku eṉṟum ekkālē. (II–9–7)

Translation

Oh, Lord, You haven't granted me the favour
Of attaining your lotus feet for ever;
However long I wrap You in my mind, non-satiate you are,
Pray appear before me, for my eyes to feast for ever.

Note

The Āḻvār feels that, having whetted his God-thirst and God-hunger, it was but meet that the Lord should appear before him for his eyes to continually drink deep of His nectarean beauty.

ekkālattu entaiyāy eṉṉuḷ maṉṉil, maṟṟu
ek kālattilum yātoṉṟum vēṇṭēṉ;
mikkār vēta vimalar viḻuṅkum eṉ
akkārak kaṉiyē! uṉṉai yāṉē. (II–9–8)

Translation

You, Vedic scholars of rank and repute do (with love) devour,
Oh, my candy- fruit, my eternal Master,
If you shall my mind enter and stay there, firm and secure,
Never shall I from you seek any other favour, (be sure).

Notes

(i) Rock-candy is a delicious product of cane-juice and it is the Āḻvār's figment of imagination that conceives of the Lord being as delicious as the fruit of the imaginary Rock-candy tree. (akkārakkaṉi is the term used in the original text of this song, to denote this imaginary fruit of an imaginary tree).

(ii) The versification, as above, conforms to the interpretation of this song (original) by 'Emperumāṉār (Rāmānuja). Śrī Āḷavantār (Yāmuṉa) would, however, appear to have interpreted this song, as follows:

"My Lord, if you would only enter my heart, as my Sovereign Master, even if it be for a split second, I shall not seek from you any favour, at any other time, not even this very favour now sought".

yāṉē eṉṉai aṟiyakilātē,
yāṉē eṉ-taṉatē eṉṟu iruntēṉ;
yāṉē nī; eṉ uṭaimaiyum nīyē;
vāṉē ēttum em vāṉavar ēṟē! (II–9–9)

Translation

Oh, my Lord, by the entire heaven adored!
Chief of Celestials, Fancied I, in ignorance bred,
I my master was and all things mine own;
But now do I realise, all are yours, I and mine.

Note

The Lord had done His best, down the ages, to reclaim the Āḻvār but the latter was striking a divergent path all the time, not knowing his essential nature and relationship with God. Prior to his reclamation, the Āḻvār was like unto a Prince, fallen into the hands of a hunter and brought up like the hunter's son in strange environments, totally alien to his native surroundings. But now true knowledge has dawned on him and he is in a position to advise the people around to disengage themselves from the erroneous notions of 'I' and 'Mine' and be rooted in the Lord, whose exclusive vassals they are, solely dependent on Him.

ēṟēl ēḻum veṉṟu, ēr koḷ ilaṅkaiyai
nīṟē ceyta neṭuñ cuṭarc cōti!
tēṟēl eṉṉai; uṉ poṉ-aṭi cērttu ollai;
vēṟē pōka eññāṉṟum viṭalē. (II–9–10)

Translation

My resplendent Lord; you tamed the seven bulls unruly
And routed Laṅkā, the city beautiful; trust me not,
Better take me quick to your golden feet
And never allow me to slip back to things worldly.

Note

Lord : Āḻvār, I suppose you are quite safe now and have nothing more to fear."

Āḻvār : "Sire, you can't be too certain about me, still in this material body, and in these frightful surroundings. Situated as I am, the possibility of my going astray and slipping back to old ways cannot be ruled out. I cannot, therefore, feel safe unless and until I am laid at your feet firmly. To get at me, you can of course root out the impediments even as you tamed the unruly bulls and destroyed Laṅkā, to get at Nappiṉṉai and Sīta respectively.

viṭal il cakkarattu aṇṇalai mēval
viṭal il vaṇ kurukūrc caṭakōpaṉ
keṭal il āyirattuḷ ivai pattum
keṭal il vīṭu ceyyum kiḻarvārkkē. (II–9–11)

Translation

These songs ten, out of the thousand immortal songs
Of Kurukūr Caṭakōpaṉ, ever close to the Lord,
Who the discus inseparable holds, will unto those that sing
Them ardently, bestow heavenly bliss, from all ills freed.

Notes

(i) These ten stanzas will confer on those who recite them heavenly bliss. It need not be questioned how these songs could, by themselves, grant Mokṣa, which is the sole prerogative of the Supreme Lord. What is intended to be conveyed by this end-song is that the recital of these ten songs will gladden the Lord and, as a consequence thereof, His gift of Mokṣa will follow. C.f. IV-5-11 where the lotus-born Lakṣmī is said to confer Mokṣa on those who recite the ten tanzas in that decad. Actually, the Lord is the sole Granter of Mokṣa but He grants it only through the instrumentality of Śrī Lakṣmī, as the Grand Intercessor between Man and God and her recommendatory role plays a very vital part in the ascent of Man to the foot-stool of God.

(ii) In the last song, the Āḻvār had requested the Lord not to let him slip back to his old ways. The Lord assured the Āḻvār that he need have no misgivings whatsoever and added that it was not for giving up devotees like him that He was carrying in His hand the discus all the time. By implication, He could hold on to His devotee as firmly as He held the discus.

Second centum—Tenth decad (II-10)
(Kiḻar oḻi iḷamai)

Preamble

In the last decad, the Āḻvār stressed the need for quick action on the part of the Lord, while praying that He should take service from him, at all times. The Āḻvār's agitation for expeditious result was, however, construed by the Lord as the Āḻvār's desire to serve in this body itself and He, therefore, directed the Āḻvār to serve Him in His Iconic Form in Tirumāliruñcōlai malai (very near to Maturai in the South), a nice, quiet place, abounding in lovely hills and beautiful orchards. The Āḻvār accordingly enjoys alike the pilgrim centre and the Lord enshrined there, his predilections extending even to the other hills, in and around, and the very route leading thereto.

kiḻar oḻi iḷamai keṭuvataṉ muṉṉam,
vaḷar oḷi māyōṉ maruviya kōyil,
vaḷar iḷam poḻil cūḻ māliruñcōlai
taḷarvu ilar ākic cārvatu catirē. (II–10–1)

Translation

Ere the youth, up and radiant, gets blasted
'Tis but meet that one reaches with a mind steadfast,

Māliruñcōlai, the hill resort, full of orchards,
Young and lovely, where stays always the wondrous Lord
Of (growing splendour and) mounting radiance.

Notes

(i) Even reaching the holy place, 'Tirumāliruñcōlai Malai', is an end in itself, says the Āḻvār. Even as one is advised to acquire knowledge when still young so as to reap the benefit thereof, in later years, one is advised to go to this pilgrim centre while still young and before the sensual pleasures get hold of the rising youth and distract it.

(ii) There is nothing like growth or diminution, waxing or waning for the Lord Who is immutable and yet, His Splendour is said to grow by virtue of the exhilarating impact of this lovely station on the Lord. This is sheer poetic grandeur extolling the beauty of the place.

(iii) This is one of the four principal Vaiṣṇava Pilgrim centres, the other three being Śrīraṅgam, Tirumalai and Kāñcipuram.

catir iḻa maṭavār tāḻcciyai matiyātu,
atir kural caṅkattu aḻakar-tam kōyil,
mati tavaḻ kuṭumi māliruñcōlaip
patiyatu ētti eḻuvatu payaṉē. (II–10–2)

Translation

Better ignore the viles and charms of damsels young
And on Māliruñcōlai, meditate for your good;
The Moon walks on its tops and the conch keeps blowing
In the temple of Aḻakar, our Lord.

payaṉ alla ceytu payaṉ illai, neñcē!
puyal malai vaṇṇar purintu uṟai kōyil,
mayal miku poḻil cūḻ māliruñcōlai
ayalmalai aṭaivatu atu karumamē. (II–10–3)

Translation

My mind, better desist from deeds futile
And reach the mount beside Māliruñ Cōlai, lovely and fertile,
Surrounded by many an enchanting orchard,
The favourite resort of the cloud-hued Lord.

Notes

(i) In the last two stanzas, the Āḻvār expatiated on the glory of the Pilgrim centre, Known as 'Māliruñ cōlai', treating one's visit to that place or mere meditation of the station as an end in itself. And now, the Āḻvār extends the same treatment even to another mount in its vicinity, by virtue of its associaton with 'Māliruñcōlai Malai'.

(ii) The futile deeds, referred to, are rites and rituals performed for attaining swarga etc, or even contemplation of the Lord's transcendent glory and the by-gone Avatāras. The emphasis thus rests on this pilgrim centre which is now getting broad-based so as to include the neighbouring mountain, as well.

karuma vaṉ pācam kaḻittu uḻaṉṟu uyyavē,
perumalai eṭuttāṉ pīṭu uṟai kōyil,
varu malai tavaḻum māliruñcōlait
tirumalaiatuvē, aṭaivatu tiṟamē. (II–10–4)

Translation

Going over to Māliruñ cōlai is real good,
Where the rain-clouds crawl and dwells the Lord
For ever, for us to serve Him and get undone
Our '*Kārmik*' bonds tough; His person does the glory beam
Of His great deliverance of Mount (Govardhan)

Note

To extricate ourselves from the otherwise inextricable bondage of 'Karma' and to serve the Lord, the Āḻvār deems it but proper that we should reach this sacred hill where the Lord stays for ever, with great delight. That He is the great deliverer is writ large on the person of Lord Aḻakar enshrined

there, proclaiming His great glory as the deliverer of the inhabitants of the pastoral village of Gokula from the fury of Indra, by holding aloft Mount Govardhana for a whole week during His Avatāra as Kṛṣṇa.

tiṟam-uṭai valattāl tīviṉai perukkātu,
aṟam muyal āḻip paṭaiyavaṉ kōyil,
maṟu il vaṇ cuṉai cūḻ māliruñcōlaip
puṟamalai, cārap pōvatu kiṟiyē. (II–10–5)

Translation

Do not your energy dissipate and your sins multiply.
Better go to the mount close to Māliruñ Cōlai,
Surrounded by cascades, neat and lovely,
Where stays the Lord, bent on protection
Of His devotees, holding the discus, that benevolent weapon.

Note

The Āḻvār brings on a par with 'Māliruñ Cōlai malai' another mount around. He advises that all one's energy, that might otherwise be dissipated on selfish pursuits breeding endless sins, could as well be used up in going on a pilgrimage to the said mount.

kiṟi eṉa niṉaimiṉ! kīḻmai ceyyātē,
uṟi amar veṇṇey uṇṭavaṉ kōyil,
maṟiyoṭu piṇai cēr māliruñcōlai–
neṟi paṭa atuvē, niṉaivatu nalamē. (II–10–6)

Translation

Desist from base deeds and remember
'Tis good to think solely of traversing the road
Which leads to Māliruñ Cōlai where live together
Herds of deer and young ones and stays our Lord,
Who from hanging hoops ate up all the butter.

Notes

(i) The Āḻvār advises people to divert the mind from sensual pleasures and *fix it on the route leading to 'Māliruñ*

Cōlai' where Lord Kṛṣṇa stays on, to grant 'darśan' to us, the post-incarnation beneficiaries.

(ii) Even as the deer and the young ones stay together, it behoves us to stay on with the Lord, our eternal Father and Mother, rolled into one.

nalam eṉa niṉaimiṉ! naraku aḻuntātē,
nilam muṉam iṭantāṉ nīṭu uṟai kōyil,
malam aṟu mati cēr māliruñcōlai,
valam muṟai eyti maruvutal valamē. (II–10–7)

Translation

It would be best if you got yourself attached,
With due reverence, to Māliruñ Cōlai where shines
The Moon clear and dwells the Lord Who once
Redeemed the Earth (as the Boar unique); better teach
Your mind this advice good, let it not dredge in hell.

Notes

(i) Going to hell does not mean that those who somehow fail to visit this pilgrim centre will go to hell. To be in conjunction with the Lord, as Sītā put it to Śrī Rāma before setting out for exile, is Swarga while being away from Him is hell. The emphasis here is, therefore, on not getting parted from the Lord.

(ii) The Moon's blemishes having been removed by his rubbing against the hill-top of this station, he is shining quite clear.

(iii) "*With due reverence*": duly realising the inter-relationship between Man and God.

valañceytu, vaikal valam kaḻiyātē,
valañceyyum āya–māyavaṉ kōyil,
valañceyyum vāṉōr māliruñcōlai,
valañceytu nāḷum maruvutal vaḻakkē. (II–10–8)

Translation

Acquire strength all right but waste it never,
Better go round daily Māliruñ Cōlai where stands enshrined

The wondrous shepherd (Kṛṣṇa), our great Benefactor
And the Celestials come down and move around.

Notes

(i) The Lord gives Himself unto His devotees, besides the strength to enjoy the rapport with Him. Lord Aḷakar Himself goes round Mount Māliruñcōlai, in the company of His Consorts, even as Śrī Rāma and Sītā went round, hand in hand, the mountain slopes of Citrakūṭa.

Even as the citizens of Ayodhyā followed Śrī Rāma when he went into exile, the Celestials do come to this pilgrim centre and circumambulate the temple of Aḷakar. It would indeed be a grievous misuse of the specially endowed human body, highly conducive to holding communion with the Lord and serving Him in a number of ways, if it strayed into the domain of sensual pleasures, thus moving in the opposite direction.

(ii) Nañcīyar is said to have related from personal experience how he observed Śrī Parāśara Bhaṭṭar and Piḷḷai Tirunarayūr Arayar, leisurely pacing about the premises of the temples, gazing at the tall turrets and the lovely mansions around, in short, imbibing every small detail, literally drinking them in, with their eyes. This was in dire contrast to the men of the world to whom visiting temples is a mere formality, moving about like race-horses, as if it is a place more to hurry from. For the great Savants to whom the Lord is at once the Means and the End, temples are places to stay and serve. No doubt, genuflections and circumambulations do not serve as the 'Means' for them and yet, they get absorbed in the sanctity of the temples and their surroundings, as an end in itself.

vaḷakku eṉa niṉaimiṉ, valviṉai mūḷkātu;
aḷakkoṭi aṭṭāṉ amar peruṅkōyil,
maḷak kaḷiṟṟu iṉam cēr māliruñcōlai,
toḷak karutuvatē tuṇivatu cūtē. (II-10-9)

Translation

Get not immersed in dire sins,
Take this advice just and wholesome,
'Tis best that you firmly resolve to worship
Māliruñ Cōlai where elephants young herd up
And there is the huge temple of the Lord,
Who, the devil of a woman destroyed.

Notes

(i) The Āḷvār says, it would suffice even if one just resolved to worship this pilgrim centre.

(ii) The devil of a woman referred to here is Pūtanā.

(iii) Speaking about the herds of young elephants mustering here in strength, Nampiḷḷai observes that it is no wonder that the Lord (Aḷakar) standing like an elephant, Young and majestic, (Cōlai Maḷakkaḷiṟu) as Tirumaṅkai Āḷvār appreciates the Deity, attracts thousands of elephants.

cūtu eṉṟu kaḷavum cūtum ceyyātē,
vētam muṉ virittāṉ virumpiya kōyil,
mātu uṟu mayil cēr māliruñcōlaip
pōtu aviḻ malaiyē, pukuvatu poruḷē. (II-10-10)

Translation

Giving up gambling and thieving as means of subsistence,
Get into Mount Māliruñcōlai, your final goal
Where flowers are in full bloom and lovely peacocks, in pairs, revel
And there is the temple where the Lord lovingly stays,
Who did elaborate the contents of the Scriptures, long back.

Notes

(i) 'Thieving' refers to '*Ātma apahāra*', the stealing of the Soul, looking upon ourselves as our own Masters ignoring the fundamental fact that we belong to the Lord.

(ii) *Gambling*: indulging in quibblings to put people on the wrong track and dissuade them from believing in the existence of God, good and bad, and things of that sort.

(iii) Long, long ago, the Lord disseminated the Vedas, unseen, and later on, as Lord Kṛṣṇa, He expounded their inner meanings, right from the chariot on the battlefield; Bhagavad Gitā is but a restatement of the central teachings of the Upaniṣhads.

(iv) The Lord loves to stay in this pilgrim centre, just to attract, by His exquisite charm, those not amenable to His advice (upadeśa).

(v) *Final Goal*: Going to Māliruñcōlai is an end in itself.

poruḷ eṉṟu iv ulakam paṭaittavaṉ pukaḻmēl
maruḷ il vaṇ kurukūr vaṇ caṭakōpaṉ
teruḷ koḷḷac coṉṉa ōr āyirattuḷ ip pattu
aruḷuṭaiyavaṉ–tāḷ aṇaivikkum muṭittē. (II–10–11)

Translation

These ten songs out of the thousand imparted
By mighty Caṭakōpaṉ of famous Kurukūr, with clarity great,
Shedding on us knowledge, clear and concise, about the Lord
Of many an auspicious trait, Who the worlds did hopefully create,
Will cut out *Samsāra* and put us at His merciful feet.

Notes

(i) As already explained in II-9-11, what is meant here again is that the Lord will be immensely pleased with those who learn these ten songs and confer on them the benefits referred to here.

(ii) The Lord endowed us with limbs and sense-organs so as to capacitate us into a career of gainful activity. This is what is meant by creation and He goes on with it, undaunted by adverse results, always hoping for better luck, an indefatigable Cultivator, with robust optimism.

THE CENTUM, IN RETROSPECT (DECAD-WISE SUMMARY)

(II-1): The traumatic experience of the Saint, longing for the external (physical) perception of the Lord and stung by the poignancy of separation from that priceless blue-gem, the darling of the celestials, described by him in I-10-11, is set out in vivid colours *in the first decad;* thrown into a state of deep dejection, the Āḻvār stands transformed once again as a forlorn female lover;

(II-2): The erstwhile gloom of the God-lover, sunk deep in dejection, is found to have vanished, *in toto, in the second decad*, consequent upon his exhilarating union with the Lord, the pendulum having swung to the other end; in such an exultant mood, the Saint highlights the Lord's supremacy vis-a-vis Brahmā and Rudra, the possible contenders for this position of eminence, in the light of the wondrous deeds performed by the Lord during His incarnations;

(II-3): *In the third decad*, the Saint gives vent to the joy of his reunion with the enchanting Lord, an inexhaustible fountain of bliss;

(II-4): *In the fourth decad*, we see the Āḻvār, thrown into deep dejection back again, inasmuch as his longing for entry into the gatherings of the devotees and singing profusely the glory of the Lord in their steadfast company, did not materialise; assuming once again the overtones of a frustrated lover. The Nāyakī's grief is too deep for words and the gnostic mother comes on the scene and seeks clarification from the Lord as to what He proposes to do with the poor little victim, her daughter;

(II-5): Beholding, once again, the joyous Lord in all His splendour and paraphernalia, the Saint feels immensely delighted and narrates his ecstatic experience, *in the fifth decad;* the Lord meets the aspiration of the Āḻvār by conferring on him the heavenly bliss longed for by him, right here;

(II-6): *In the sixth decad*, the Āḻvār hastens to assure the Lord that he shall not part from Him any more, finding Him at the height of His joy of union with him but nevertheless apprehensive of the possibility of his slipping away, overwhelmed by His transcendent glory;

(II-7): *In the seventh decad*, the Āḻvār expatiates on the extraordinary benevolence of the Lord, in extending His grace to all those associated with him, seven generations back and forth;

(II-8): *In the eighth decad*, the Āḻvār, swayed by boundless compassion for the suffering humanity, turns round and advises them to get into the Divine fold, taking due note of the fact that the Lord is the one and only granter of Mokṣa, the final bliss, ridding them of their terrific involvement in the dreadful cycle of birth and death; (This is the second time the Āḻvār addresses the world, the first was in I-2.)

(II-9): *In the ninth decad* the Āḻvār pinpoints the concept of' Puruṣārta ', the ultimate value or final goal of every individual, the emphasis resting on the Lord's voluntary dispensation, out of His free will and spontaneous grace, individual gratification of one's own desire receding to the background altogether; what a lofty train of thought, totally bereft of egoistic impulses and putting the entire weight on the Lord!

(II-10): *In the concluding decad of this Centum,* the Āḻvār exhorts people to propitiate the hilarious Mount Tirumāliruñcōlai (near Mathurai, in Tamil Nāḍu) his predilections extending even to the other hills, in and around and the very route leading thereto; the Āḻvār advises people to go to this pilgrim centre, while still young and before the sensual pleasures get hold of the rising youth and distract it.

ERRATA (Vol. I)

Page	Line	
1	1	*For* decades *read as* decads.
1	7	*For* Divnie *read as* Divine.
2	7	Insert the following after ' say ' " that God is the fountain-source of infinite bliss ".
8	8	(From bottom *For* him *read as* Him.
15		Foot-note insert ? at the end.
18	4	(From bottom) *For* being *read as* Being.
23	15	(From bottom) *For* Those *read as* To, those
,,	11	(From bottom) insert ' by ' after ' sought '.
26	10	Delete, before ' calls '.
31	8	*For* wearing *read as* weaning.
32	12	Delete ' the ' at the beginning.
50	11	Substitute, for ! and ! for, at the end.
76	6	(From bottom) Shift the, before ' fit '.
80	13	Insert) before ' peerless ' and delete) at the end.
81	11	(From bottom) insert , before ' of '.
87	10	(From bottom) insert , before ' to '.
89	9	(From bottom) insert , after ' operates '.
91	4	Insert , after ' mind '.
101	2	*For* Discuss *read as* Discus.
105	12	*For* demons *read as* demon's.
110	19	(Forms part of line 18) *For* He *read as* he.
114	Last	*For* It *read as* I.
136	3	(From bottom) *For* apired *read as* aspired.
158	20	Substitute ! for full-stop at the end.
160	5	Insert full-stop after (Yāmuna).
161	14	*For* vallaikan *read as* vallaikāṉ.
163	8	Insert , after ' his '.
168	5	Insert , after ' of '.
172	8	*For* with *read as* within.
176	10	(From bottom) *For* of *read as* or.
183	17	*For* Fancied *read as* fancied.
191	15	Delete) before ' as '.
,,	16	Substitute) for, after ' Deity '.

BOOK III

Third Centum—First Decad (III-1)
(Muṭic cōti)

Preamble

In the end-stanza of the preceding decad, the Āḷvār had referred to himself as one possessed of a clear vision, absolutely free from doubt and despair, discrepancies and deviations. But in the very next song, that is, the first song of this decad, he seeks clarification of certain doubts and thus betrays his ignorance. Well, ignorance is of four different kinds, namely (1) *Non-comprehension.* (2) *comprehension, halfway beset with doubts,* (3) *mis-comprehension and* (4) *lapse of memory resulting in not remembering a thing previously known.* In the present case, the Āḷvār is assailed by doubts and yet, it transcends the above types of ignorance to which those still relatively unevolved and in the grip of nescience resulting from Karma, are susceptible. Here it is the bewitching splendour of Lord Aḷakar which defies description and baffles correct and complete comprehension. Enthralled by the charming personality of the Lord, the Āḷvār enquires of the Lord, " Sire, has the effulgence of your face expanded itself upwards into the dazzling crown and Your dazzling feet likewise expanded into the lotus seat on which they are poised?" It is the exuberance of their God-love, too deep for words, that throws the Āḷvārs into an ecstatic state of mental imbalance and this only redounds to their glory.

The Āḷvār who expounded the glory of Mount ' Māliruñcōlai' in the last decad, now proceeds to drink deep of the nectarean charm and enthralling beauty of Lord Āḷakar (The Beautiful), enshrined there.

muṭic cōtiyāy uṉatu mukac cōti malarntatuvō?
aṭic cōti nī niṉṟa tāmaraiyāy alarntatuvō?
paṭic cōti āṭaiyoṭum pal kalaṉāy, niṉ paim poṉ-
kaṭic cōti kalantatuvō? tirumālē! kaṭṭuraiyē. (III–1–1)

Translation

May you clarify, oh, Tirumāl, if your crown aglow
Is but the upward expansion of your facial glow,

Your lotus seat, but the reflection of your dazzling feet
And the many jewels on Your person and silken garment,
But the reflection of the glow on your waist radiant.

Note

The above poser of the Āḷvār is the result of his observation of the Lord's bewitching charm, in His iconic manifestation as Aḷakar, in conjunction with the jewels adorning Him, so well matched that the Āḷvār sees the crown as but an upward expansion of the effulgence on the Lord's face. At the other end, the lotus seat on which the Lord's feet are poised seems to be but a reflection of the effulgence on the Lord's feet. Perhaps, there are no Jewels as such and the jewels that are seen are but a manifestation of the brilliant complexion of the Lord's body and the flowing silken robe is, likewise, the reflection of the lustre around the Lord's waist. In short, it is the Lord's native charm and brilliance that pervade all round and give the beholder the impression that the Lord is bedecked with numerous Jewels and donning the silken robes. Even the 'Nityās', the ever-free angels in heaven, share this stunning experience with the Āḷvār who thus moves in good company. Indeed it is not too much to say that the Lord Himself is not aware of the precise extent of His charm and prowess.

kaṭṭuraikkil, tāmarai niṉ kaṇ, pātam, kai ovvā;
cuṭṭu uraitta naṉ poṉ uṉ tirumēṉi oḷi ovvātu;
oṭṭu uraittu iv ulaku uṉṉaip pukaḻvu ellām perumpālum,
peṭṭuraiyāy, puṟku eṉṟē kāṭṭumāl; parañcōti! (III–1–2)

Translation

My resplendent Lord, if one described your charm exquisite,
The lotus flower will into your eyes, hands and feet,
Bear no comparison, the lustrous gold cannot compete
With your complexion grand and all the eulogy
On you heaped by men of this world, on the analogy
Of things worldly, will be mere words, insipid and foggy.

Note

The Lord's exquisite charm can best be enjoyed only by drinking it in, with one's eyes and mind. Words are but poor substitutes, and the comparisons, similies and analogies indulged in by us, worldlings, are much too-feeble and faulty too, and cannot, therefore, describe the Lord's exquisite features effectively.

parañcōti nī paramāy, niṉ ikaḻntu, piṉ maṟṟu ōr
param cōti iṉmaiyiṉ, paṭi ōvi nikaḻkiṉṟa
parañcōti niṉṉuḷḷē paṭar ulakam paṭaitta em
parañcōti kōvintā! paṇpu uraikka māṭṭēṉē. (III–1–3)

Translation

Oh, Lord of splendour supreme, with none so resplendent,
Comparison you transcend, by Your resolve radiant,
You did the sprawling universe create,
Oh, Kōvintā of rare brilliance, describe I can't Your attributes.

Note

Lord to the Āḷvār: "Āḷvār, I agree that the worldlings cannot praise Me adequately. But you should be able to do full justice, having been endowed by Me with knowledge, full and flooding".

Āḷvār to the Lord: "My Lord, none in any clime can make pretensions to your unrivalled splendour. Having, by a mere resolve, created the entire Universe, you are beyond the ken of comprehension of any one. At the same time, your *Saulabhya* (easy accessibility) is astounding. Even if one could find the summit of your transcendent glory, it is well nigh impossible to sound the depth of your amazing simplicity as Govinda (Kōvinta, in Tamil) and touch the floor space. The former can be talked about while it is pretty difficult even to ponder in one's mind about the latter and much less talk about it".

māṭṭātē ākilum, im malar talai mā ñālam, niṉ–
māṭṭu āya malar puraiyum tiruvuruvam maṉam vaikka
māṭṭāta pala camaya mati koṭuttāy; malart tuḻāy–
māṭṭē nī maṉam vaittāy; mā ñālam varuntātē? (III–1–4)

Translation

The sprawling world which did from your navel sprout,
Thinks not your glory and your form exquisite
(And worse still), many a religion is extant,
Preaching heretical doctrines, the mind errant
You gave them and yet if you are solely intent
On enjoying the fragrance from your tuḷaci garland,
Won't it be a grievous loss for this world indeed?

Notes

(i) Brahmā, the demi-urge, emerged from the lotus stalk on the Lord's navel and created all the worlds; hence the worlds are said to have come up from the Lord's navel.

(ii) No doubt, in the preceding song, the Āḻvār confessed to his inability to describe the Lord's attributes and yet it is Lord Aḻakar's extraordinary beauty that eggs him on, to speak out his mind, deploring, at the same time, the aloofness of the world from the Lord, so sweet and exquisite. People have already no taste for Godhead and it is grievous enough. Further deterioration sets in, when diverse religions expound mutually contradictory and incompatible tenets and doctrines. The Āḻvār says that the Lord gave rise to all this hotchpotch in as much as He didn't correct the minds of those going the wrong way. If, in a grievous situation like this, the Lord is complacent enough and his attention gets fixed on the sweet fragrance and freshness of His tuḷaci garland, instead of being harnessed to the reclamation of the errant Subject, there is indeed no hope of redemption for this world. This observation of the Āḻvār arises from his enjoyment of Lord Aḻakar's exquisite beauty and the feeling of sorrow that the world around is unmindful of the Lord, so sweet and exquisite, because of the above factors. There is also the grand poetic imagery, the poet bringing out that Lord Aḻakar's charm is so alluring that it ensnares Him as well and makes him oblivious of the imperative need to correct the world from going the wrong way

under the unwholesome impact of heretical doctrines, propounded by perverts.

varuntāta arum tavatta malar katiriṉ cuṭar uṭampu āy,
varuntāta ñāṉam āy, varampu iṉṟi muḻutu iyaṉṟāy!
varum-kālam, nikaḻ-kālam, kaḻi-kālam āy, ulakai
oruṅkāka aḷippāy! cīr eṅku ulakka ōtuvaṉē? (III–1–5)

Translation

Your resplendent form you assume at your volition sweet,
The result perhaps of your devotees' penance great;
Knowledge supreme is yours with no effort,
Pervading without limits, the worlds you duly protect,
Time is at your beck and call, past, present
And future, how can I, your attributes fully relate?

Note

The preceding stanza (III-1-4) stands in isolation; in the midst of his enjoyment of Lord Aḻakar, the Āḻvār's heart leapt towards the straying humanity and deplored their failure, rather their inability to feast on the exquisite charm of Aḻakar. This song has, therefore, to be studied in continuation of the third stanza where the Āḻvār had said " Oh, Kovindā, how can I describe your attributes?" The Lord rebuts the Āḻvār's plea of inability, despite his supreme knowledge. Here then is the Āḻvār's elucidation of his limitations, despite all that massive knowledge, dowered on him by the Lord whose glory, however, knows no bounds and cannot, therefore, be fully comprehended and expressed by any one. As a matter of fact, complete enumeration of the Lord's glory, His auspicious traits etc, would be possible, only if they remained encompassed by known limits.

ōtuvār ōttu ellām ev ulakattu ev evaiyum
cātuvāy niṉ pukaḻiṉ takai allāl piṟitu illai;
pōtu vāḻ puṉam tuḻāy muṭiyiṉāy! pūviṉmēl
mātu vāḻ mārpiṉāy! eṉ colli yāṉ vāḻttuvaṉē? (III–1–6)

Translation

My Lord, wearing on your crown tuḷaci garland,
Set with *choice* flowers and holding on your lovely chest
Mātu (Lakṣmī), the lotus-born! the scriptures and sacred texts,
In the entire land, out to praise you, lag far behind,
How indeed I can praise you occurs not to my mind.

Note

All the scriptures and sacred texts can only make an attempt to sing the Lord's praise; none of these can, however, sing His glory, *in toto*. These praises are like unto the rain drops falling on the surface of the oceanic waters without, however, swelling them up. The faculty of speech dowered on us by the Lord is indeed put to proper use when we sing His glory, however poor our capacity may be. If the tongue is, however, put to any other use, it gets defiled like rain drops falling on mud becoming muddy, unlike those falling into the ocean remaining in tact.

vāḻttuvār palar āka; niṉṉuḷḷē nāṉmukaṉai
mūḻtta nīr ulaku ellām paṭai eṉṟu mutal-paṭaittāy!
kēḻtta cīr araṉ mutalāk kiḻar teyvamāyk kiḻarntu
cūḻttu amarar tutittāl, uṉ tol pukaḻ mācūṇātē? (III–1–7)

Translation

First and foremost, Nāṉmukaṉ (Brahmā) You did, by your resolve, raise
And bade him create the worlds many, out of the deep waters;
If Araṉ (Śiva) of prowess great and other devas who pose
As the gods potent, your creatures all, were to sing your praise,
Would it not your ancient glory efface?

Note

What does it matter how many sing the Lord's glory and how powerful and knowledgeable they are? None can indeed be more articulate than the Vedas and even they can have only a sense of participation in a scheme of recital of the Lord's glory, as distinguished from a sense of due fulfilment. Even the exalted Śiva, known for His extra-

ordinary wisdom, is no exception and fares no better. The measure of the Lord's glory is as unlimited as the capacity of even the most knowledgeable of His subjects to sing His glory is miserably limited and pales into insignificance. Any attempt on their part to exhaustively sing His glory is thus an affront to His hoary fame.

mācūṇāc cuṭar uṭampuāy, malarātu kuviyātu
mācūṇā ñāṉam āy, muḻutum āy, muḻutu iyaṉṟāy!
mācūṇā vāṉ kōlattu amarar-kōṉ vaḻippaṭṭāl,
mācūṇā uṉa pātamalarc cōti maḻuṅkātē? (III–1–8)

Translation

Oh Lord of radiant person, immaculate!
Your knowledge flawless, full and complete,
Neither expands nor contracts,
All things you control and in you they subsist;
Wouldn't the splendour diminish of your blemishless lotus feet
Even if Brahmā, the impeccable chief sang your glory to his utmost?

Note

Even if Brahmā who is relatively superior to Śiva, attempted to sing the Lord's glory, the result would be just the same.

maḻuṅkāta vain nutiya cakkara nal valattaiyāy,
toḻum kātal-kaḷiṟu aḷippāṉ, puḷ ūrntu tōṉṟiṉaiyē;
maḻuṅkāta ñāṉamē paṭai āka malar-ulakil
toḻumpāyārkku aḷittāl, uṉ cuṭarc cōti maṟaiyātē? (III–1–9)

Translation

(It was but meet that) you went and rescued
The elephant, passionately intent on worshipping you,
Mounted on that bird (Garuḍa) and wielding the discus ever acute;
(If instead), by mere resolve, ever alert, you did succour
Your devotees in this wide world, all over,
On your splendour great, it would indeed be a slur.

Notes

(i) The omnipotent Lord could, by a mere resolve, create this vast and wonderful universe. He can likewise achieve all things, by a mere resolve from His heavenly abode, without moving about. And then, He has such powerful weapons as the discus, ever sharp, which can be commissioned at any time, anywhere. And yet, when Gajendra the pious elephant, engaged in a titanic struggle with a crocodile, raised an alarum inviting the Lord's help, the Lord rushed to the pond, mounted on Garuḍa, without merely commissioning the discus to do the job. In fact, He had no other option. The elephant entered the lotus pond, plucked a lotus flower to be offered to the Supreme Lord, Nārāyaṇa, and, in the process, got caught by a crocodile. In the long and grim struggle that ensued, the elephant got terribly emaciated and yet, his sole concern was to offer the flower to the Lord and hence, the alarum raised by him. Unto the Lord who presented Himself before the elephant, the latter declared;

"Oh, Slayer of Madhu, I was not in the least worried about this mortal frame, bound to decay some day, but my sole concern was to worship you and offer this lotus flower in my trunk (hand) at your golden feet". How can the aspiration of such an ardent devotee be fulfilled by the Lord, *in absentia*, by the mere exercise of His '*Saṅkalpa*' (resolve) from where He is seated, like pressing a button afar, with all its mechanical efficiency? This brings us on to the purpose of the Lord's Avatārs, main and secondary.

(ii) There are three components in the Lord's motive behind His incarnations, viz,

(i) *Paritrāṇāya Sādhūnām*—Sādhu paritrāṇaṁ or protection of the righteous;

(ii) *Vināśāya ca duṣkrtām*—Duṣṭa nigraha or vanquishing the evil—doers,

(iii) *Dharma Samstāpanārthāya*—resuscitation and establishment of dharma, (moral standards).

(iii) A little probe into this will reveal that (I) above, is the main purpose and that the other two are merely auxiliary thereto or the ingredients thereof. Even so, would it be necessary for the Lord to assume a special form and incarnate without merely contemplating, "May the righteous prosper and the evil forces die out?"

No, this won't do, the Lord has to necessarily come down to meet the aspirations, the deep yearnings of the devout. What is, "*Sādhu paritrāṇam*' after all? It is nothing but the fulfilment of the aspirations of the devout and the cutting out of things disliked by them. He cannot resist their deepest urges and inclinations, such as drinking in, with their naked eyes, the Lord's nectarean beauty, an irresistible longing to embrace Him bodily and so on. It is during such contacts, that the Lord's auspicious traits shine forth and it is only the contemplation of these traits, down the ages, long after He has gone back to the Celestium, that sustains the Sādhus (the devout), down to the present day and this, in essence, is the "*Sādhu paritrāṇaṁ*".

maṟai āya nāl vētattuḷ niṉṟa malarc cuṭarē!
muṟaiyāl iv ulaku ellām paṭaittu, iṭantu, uṇṭu, umiḻntu,
alantāy!
piṟai ēṟu caṭaiyāṉum nāṉmukaṉum intiraṉum
iṟai ātal aṟintu ētta, vīṟṟiruttal itu viyappē? (III-1-10)

Translation

My lustrous Lord, enshrined you are in the Vedas four
Which (unto aliens and heretics) reveal you not,
The worlds you did create, picked them out from deep waters,
Ate them up (during the deluge) and then spat them out,
You spanned them too; seen thus as the Supreme Master,
If you are worshipped by Śiva who does sport

The crescent Moon on matted locks, Nāṉmukaṉ (Brahmā, the four-headed)
And Intira, is it really any wonder indeed?

Note

Brahmā was created by the Lord and all the rest created by Brahmā. And then, it is the Lord who redeemed the worlds from underneath the Oceanic waters, sustained them inside His stomach during the period of deluge and put them back, in position, later on. He also spanned all the worlds in just three strides. It is, therefore, hardly any matter for wonder that His Supremacy is readily realised by those super-eminent personalities created by the Lord Himself, Brahmā, Śiva and Intira, and He is worshipped by them all. Nor can the Lord feel flattered by such worship by His own creatures, a mockery of worship, like unto a person setting his foot on the head of a doll of his, decorated by him and pompously declaring that the latter worshipped him.

viyappu āya viyappu illā meyñ ñāṉa vētiyaṉaic
cayap pukaḻār palar vāḻum taṭam-kurukūrc caṭakōpaṉ
tuyakku iṉṟit toḻutu uraitta āyirattuḷ ip pattum
uyakkoṇṭu piṟappu aṟukkum oli munnīr ñālattē. (III–1–11)

Translation

This decad, out of the thousand, crystal-clear,
Composed by Caṭakōpaṉ of Kurukūr, the mighty abode
Of men of spiritual fame, in adoration of the Lord,
By Vedas truly revealed, above all known wonders,
Will from rebirth rid men of this world, bound by roaring waters.

Notes

(i) The Lord is a marvel unto Himself. What appears to be a matter of wonder for us, with limited intellect and meagre perception, is by-no-means wonderful for Him, who is the All-powerful Lord of the entire Universe. If some one presented to another as many as four cows at a time, it would indeed be a matter for surprise but if Lord Rāma gifted away thousands of cows to a poor brahmin (Tṛjaḍar) on the eve of setting out in exile, as we read in Chapter 32 of Ayodhyā Kāṇḍa of Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa, it looks quite natural and there is nothing odd about it.

(ii) The chanters of this decad will get elevated from the bottom-most depths, as good as non-existent, to the highest heights.

Third Centum—Second Decad (III-2)
(Munnīr ñālam)

Preamble

We have only to imagine the pangs of a person unable to quench his extreme thirst, notwithstanding the availability of plenty of water near at hand, just because his mouth is sealed up (like Tantalus in the Greek legend). We will then be able to appreciate the most unenviable predicament in which the Āḻvār found himself, suffering from the figurative lock-jaw. Here is the Lord in His worshippable form, of insatiable beauty, near at hand, and yet, the Āḻvār is not able to comprehend and enjoy Him as well as He would like to, severely handicapped as he is, by the heavy limitations inherent in his earthly existence, tethered to this material body. No doubt, the Lord, in His unbounded mercy, has dowered on us limbs and sense-organs to impart mobility and put us on a career of gainful activity. Not stopping with this alone, He condescended to present Himself before the Subjects during His Avatāras and mixed with them freely. And yet, all these benefits do not currently fill the Āḻvār's bill. On the other hand, he is regretting his inability to enjoy the Lord, in His 'Arcā (Iconic manifestation), *in toto*, and give the fullest expression to such enjoyment. God is limitless but the Saint has his limitations although his craving is very great.

The present agony of the Āḻvār is thus due to his inability to limit the limitless, rather, the small range of the powers of his mind and the senses vis-a-vis the enjoyment of the boundless

beatific vision of the Lord. It is, however, seen that, towards the end of this decad, the Lord consoles the Āḻvār by telling him that the Celestials, shorn of material contacts, are also on the same footing as the Āḻvār and they too have their limitations. The Āḻvār is, however, beckoned by the Lord to enjoy His iconic form at Tiruvēṅkaṭam, to his heart's content. Thus consoled, the Āḻvār ends this decad on a happy note.

When Śrī Parāśara Bhaṭṭar discoursed on this song, his younger brother, Srīrāmappiḷḷai raised the following point. "I find that the Āḻvār's distress is neither due to his longing for the heavenly bliss, right from here, nor due to his craving for the enjoyment of God in His incarnations in by-gone times. His distress seems to have arisen after the Lord was pleased to grant him the enjoyment of His worshippable (Arcā) form as Aḻakar, in 'Tirumāliruñ Cōlai', when, in fact, one should have expected him to go on revelling in the enjoyment of the Lord, so sweet and exquisite. It is indeed puzzling in this context how the anguish has, at all, arisen".

The illustrious Bhaṭṭārya elucidated, as follows: "The different manifestations (Para, Vyūha, Vibhava, Antaryāmi and Arcā) of one and the same God cannot affect His Solidarity. God is immense and infinite. When His beatific vision was presented to the Saint through the medium of Aḻakar he could enjoy it only as much as his limited capacity could permit, even as one visualises the vast ocean, only as much as the eye apprehends. Here then is the tussle between the Āḻvār's limited capacity, on the one hand, and his enormous longing on the other, and the resultant mental agony".

munnīr ñālam paṭaitta em mukil vaṇṇaṉē!
aṉ nāḷ nī tanta ākkaiyiṉvaḻi uḻalvēṉ,
vem nāḷ-nōy vīya, viṉaikaḷai vēr aṟap pāyntu,
eṉ nāḷ yāṉ uṉṉai iṉi vantu kūṭuvaṉē? (III-2-1)

Translation

My cloud-hued Lord, You raised this world,
Surrounded by oceanic waters; in this body, by you dowered
Stray do I, pursuing its (errant) ways; I know not when
My ills will be rooted out and you I shall attain.

Notes

Āḻvār to the Lord

(i) "I was like a wingless bird and by giving me the limbs etc., you capacitated me for a career of gainful activity. But alas! the body, so kindly dowered by you, was misused by me and I have got all miseries heaped on my head. Now that I can hardly brook any separation from you, when will my deadly sins, the impediments for my union with you, be rooted out and our union be hastened?

(ii) Empār is said to have lamented: "This boat of a body, dowered by you, could have been steered through to heavenly bliss but, alas! I have allowed it to be swept away by (worldly) current and capsize into the mire of sensual pleasures.

(iii) When Saints talk of ills (sickness and pain), it is not any kind of physical malady, such as remittent fever but the pain of separation from God.

vaṉ mā vaiyam aḷanta em vāmaṉā! niṉ
pal mā māyap pal piṟaviyil paṭikiṉṟa yāṉ,
tol mā valviṉait toṭarkaḷai mutal arintu,
niṉ mā tāḷ cērntu niṟpatu eññāṉṟukolō? (III-2-2)

Translation

My Lord Vāmaṉā, You measured the Worlds, vast and strong,
Caught up in the meshes of varied births and still lingering,
When will my sins, hoary and violent, be rooted out
And I remain stable at your lovely feet?

Note

Lord to the Āḻvār

"Well, if you couldn't go to me, I came to you, spanned the whole universe, high and low, and set my feet on one and all, with no distinction of rich and poor, Saint or debauchee, land and water".

Āḻvār to the Lord

"Sire, it is a pity, even then, I was out of your reach. In spite of your initial help in endowing me with a body to eke out a promising career, I got myself drowned in the ocean of Samsāra. Again, when you sought me out, as Vāmana, I drifted to another part of the ocean, very much beyond your reach and failed to avail of that golden opportunity of mass benefit".

kollā mākkōl kolaiceytu, pāratap pōr
ellāc ceṉaiyum iru nilattu avitta entāy!
pollā ākkaiyiṉ puṇarviṉai aṟukkal aṟā;
collāy, yāṉ uṉṉaic cārvatu ōr cūḻcciyē. (III-2-3)

Translation

My Master! With a (mere) non-lethal horse-whip in your hand
You routed the armies in this vast land,
(Earth's wholesome burden) in Bhārat's battle great,
May you spell out the means for cutting out
My contact with this fell body, difficult to cut,
So that I do attain your lovely feet.

Notes

(i) It is sheer ignorance to hold that the great battle of Mahā Bhārata was won by the Pāṇḍavas. Actually it was Lord Kṛṣṇa, who got Mother Earth rid of her unwholesome burden, and it was indeed the purpose of His incarnation. Barring a few, on both sides (the five Pāṇḍavas, Aśvattāma, Kṛpācārya and Kṛtavarmā), all the rest were annihilated and it was all the work of Śrī Kṛṣṇā's whip. With no other weapon in hand, the Master strategist directed and controlled the military strategy at every turn and made it possible for the Pāṇḍavas to claim victory. A mere chariot driver holding the horse whip, He ostensibly was, and yet, Arjuna thoughtfully leaned on Him, fully conscious of the basic truth that, where Lord Kṛṣṇa is, there and there, success is. On the other hand. Duryodhana who had been advised by the grand old

Bhīṣmācār to seek Śrī Kṛṣṇa's help and enlist Him on the side of the Kauravas, did make a formality of an appointment with Śrī Kṛṣṇa, but decided to give Him up, on being told that He was all alone, with no fighting force behind. The sagacious Bhīṣma regretted this fatal decision of Duryodhana and sent him back to Śrī Kṛṣṇa to extract an assurance from Him that He would not wield any weapon during the battle. The Lord readily agreed and, therefore it is, that Nammāḻvār says, in this song, that it was the mere horse-whip in the hand of the Divine Charioteer that proved so deadly.

(ii) The Saint laments that he had, not only missed the benefit of the Lord's incarnation as 'Vāmana' but also that of Kṛṣṇāvatāra, the proximate one.

cūḻcci ñāṉac cuṭar oḷi āki, eṉṟum
ēḻcci kēṭu iṉṟi, eṅkaṇum niṟainta entāy!
tāḻcci maṟṟu eṅkum tavirntu, niṉ tāḷ-iṇaikkīḻ
vāḻcci yāṉ cērumvakai aruḷāy vantē. (III-2-4)

Translation

My Lord, your radiant knowledge surrounds
One and all, you neither contract nor expand,
You pervade all over, at all times; do come and tell
How I can, thoughts other than you, dispel
And at your lovely pair of feet dwell (and revel.)

Note

Āḻvār to the Lord

"My Lord, let alone my failure to benefit by your Avatāras, as Vāmana and Kṛṣṇa. Even your Omnipresence, and omniscience, directed towards the uplift of your subjects, has not delivered the goods in my case. It is now up to you to devise other ways of redeeming me, if need be, through yet another incarnation, wholly for my sake."

vantāy pōlē vantum, eṉ maṉattiṉai nī
cintāmal ceyyāy; ituvē itu ākil,
kontu ār kāyāviṉ koḻu malart tiru niṟatta
entāy! yāṉ uṉṉai eṅku vantu aṇukiṟpaṉē? (III-2-5)

Translation

My Lord, like unto the bunchy flower red is your complexion grand,
Should you persist in denying me your helping hand
And fail to restrain my wandering mind,
How can I, on my own, attain you indeed?
Pray do appear before me, as you did
(For the sake of Gajendra and Prahlād).

Note

In the preceding song, the Āḻvār requested the Lord to incarnate once more for his sake. The Lord tells the Āḻvār that, as Śrī Rāma, He was in this abode for eleven thousand years and, as Śrī Kṛṣṇa, He stayed here for one hundred years. It would be pretty difficult for Him to incarnate again. The Āḻvār, however, pleads that the Lord should incarnate for his sake, at least for a few days, and if it wasn't possible, He could at least put in His appearance, as He did for Gajendra and Prahlāda. The Āḻvār cannot brook separation from the Lord because he cannot refrain from enjoying His exquisite beauty. And by himself, he cannot reach Him and hence the request, as above.

kiṟpaṉ, killēṉ eṉṟu ilaṉ muṉam nāḷāl;
aṟpa cāraṅkaḷ-avai cuvaittu akaṉṟoḻintēṉ;
paṟpal āyiram uyir ceyta paramā! niṉ
naṟ poṉ-cōtittāḷ naṇukuvatu eññāṉṟē? (III-2-6)

Translation

I did nothing good in the days of yore, nor desist from evil,
Away from you strayed I and got absorbed,
In pleasures petty; myriads of Souls at your sweet will
You could animate, oh, potent Lord,
When shall I your feet resplendent attain?

Note

Āḻvār to the Lord

"My Lord, I am guilty, both ways, not doing any good that will take me unto your lovely feet and at the same time, not desisting from evil, which puts me very much away from you. I strayed away from you, doing things as I liked. Seeing what you have done to myriads of souls for their uplift, I am sure I would not be asking of you too much if I prayed that you should redeem me and make me fit to attain your lustrous feet".

eññāṉṟum nām iruntu iruntu iraṅki, neñcē!
meyñ ñāṉam iṉṟi viṉai iyal piṟappu aḻunti,
eññāṉṟum eṅkum oḻivu aṟa niṟaintu niṉṟa
meyñ ñāṉac cōtik kaṇṇaṉai mēvutumē. (III-2-7)

Translation

My mind, sunk deep in ignorance and sin
We have been journeying thro' births for ever;
Shall we ever attain Kaṇṇaṉ,
The lustrous Lord omniscient, who for ever pervades all over?

Note

Mention of the Lord's resplendent feet, in the preceding song, set the Āḻvār's mind throbbing for them and now the Āḻvār hastens to disabuse his mind, sunk deep in age-long ignorance and accumulated sins, of its ill-conceived ambition.

mēvu tuṉpa viṉaikaḷai viṭuttumilēṉ;
ōvutal iṉṟi uṉ kaḻal vaṇaṅkiṟṟilēṉ;
pāvu tol cīrk kaṇṇā! eṉ parañcuṭarē!
kūvukiṉṟēṉ kāṇpāṉ; eṅku eytak kūvuvaṉē? (III-2-8)

Translation

I didn't extricate myself from sins that breed miseries many
Nor did I your holy feet worship continually;
My beloved Kaṇṇā of radiance supreme and grace in-born,
To behold you, the all-pervading, I call you out, now and again,
But you, where and how can I attain?

Note

Āḻvār to the Lord

"Sire, all along, I have been providing grist for the grinding mill of my senses but little did I do for my advancement. And now, I call you out, as if I have the necessary qualification to meet you. But you are everywhere, and in me too; you make me pounce upon your auspicious traits so natural to you that they attract even a sinner like me".

kūvik kūvik koṭuviṉait tūṟṟuḷ niṉṟu,
pāviyēṉ pala kālam vaḻi tikaittu, alamarkiṉṟēṉ;
mēvi aṉṟu ā-nirai kāttavaṉ, ulakam ellām
tāviya ammāṉai eṅku iṉit talaippeyvaṉē? (III–2–9)

Translation

Caught up in worldly life dense,
The breeding ground for dire sins,
I missed my track and for ages groped,
Many a time do I call my Sire, who once shepherded,
The cows and all the worlds measured,
Where and how shall I get Him indeed?

Note

Āḻvār to the Lord

"My Lord, as Śrī Kṛṣṇa, you protected the cows in the pastoral village of Gokula and not a drop of rain fell on them although it was pouring down with mad fury for a whole week. And then, when you spanned the entire universe, as Trivikrama, you set your lovely feet on one and all but I eluded you, even then. Having missed such a golden opportunity, where is the hope of salvation for me? Even so, I am not in a position to give you up, as it would be attempting the impossible, and I, therefore, keep on calling you. You will certainly hear me all right and respond too, by stretching out your helping hand. But then, I am sunk so deep that I am possibly out of your reach!"

talaippey kālam namaṉtamar pācam viṭṭāl,
alaippūṇ uṇṇum av allal ellām akala,
kalaip pal ñāṉattu eṉ kaṇṇaṉaik kaṇṭukoṇṭu,
nilaippeṟṟu eṉ neñcam peṟṟatu niṭu uyirē (III–2–10)

Translation

Miseries gruesome, like unto yama's yoke have ended,
And seen have I kaṇṇaṉ, my beloved Lord,
By many a sacred text comprehended;
My mind is steady and my soul restored,
To pristine purity, its due stature.

Notes

(i) Śrī Nampiḷḷai elucidates the context of this song, as follows :

Finding the Āḻvār in an extremely critical condition, the Lord calls upon him to enjoy His Iconic Form in Tiruvēṅkaṭam and sustain himself. Thereupon, the Āḻvār feels greatly relieved and gives vent to his sense of relief, in this song.

(ii) Being away from the Lord is as gruesome as suffering from Yama's yoke, the tortures inflicted by Yama's hordes.

(iii) Tirukkurukaippirāṉ Piḷḷāṉ, in his commentary known as Aṟāyirappaṭi, presents the current scene of reunion of the Lord and the Saint as follows :

The Lord seems to have got frightened of His own loss of reputation when an ardent devotee, who has taken refuge at His feet, is left in the lurch, exposed to the vagaries of Yama's assistants. C.F. Śloka 25, of Saint Yāmuna's Stotra Ratna.

uyirkaḷ ellā ulakamum uṭaiyavaṉaik
kuyil keḷ cōlait teṉ kurukūrc caṭakōpaṉ
ceyir il col icai mālai āyirattuḷ ip pattum
uyiriṉmēl ākkai ūṉiṭai oḻivikkumē. (III–2–11)

Translation

These songs ten, in the hymnal garland of thousand, Chaste and sweet,
Knit by Caṭakōpaṉ of Kurukūr in whose orchards Koels go gay,
In adoration of the Sovereign Master of all the worlds and their beings,
Will rid (the chanters) of their fleshy shackles.

Notes

(i) The Āḷvār invests the Lord and the surroundings with his own feelings. Now that he has been put back on his feet, he sees in the Lord a special aura, and His ownership of all things and souls now becomes more pronounced, with the resuscitation of the Āḷvār himself.

(ii) Kurukūr is described, in this song, as a lovely place abounding in orchards, where koels sing merrily. When the Āḷvār was sunk in dejection due to separation from the Lord, the Koels had also lapsed into silence. Now that the Āḷvār is happy, these birds also sing sweet strains, as before.

Third Centum—Third Decad (III-3)
(Oḻivu il kālam)

Preamble

The Āḷvār prayed to the Lord that his body, the material shackle, which stood in the way of his enjoyment of the Lord, be cut out. But then, the Lord pacified the Āḷvār by pointing out that this body of the Āḷvār in which the Lord eventually got hold of him was by-no-means an impediment, as he thought it to be. On the other hand, He literally coveted him, in that very body, and very much desired to take service from him, in his present embodied state. And so, the Lord beckoned the Āḷvār to serve Him in His Arcā Form at Tiruvēṅkaṭam. Against this background the Āḷvār seeks to render blemishless service unto the Lord at Tiruvēṅkaṭam in ever so many ways, without break, even as a person, feeling the pinch of hunger and with the food packet in hand, sets the table as soon as he comes across a suitable spot with shade and water.

oḻivu il kālam ellām uṭaṉāy maṉṉi,
vaḻu ilā aṭimai ceyyavēṇṭum nām—
teḻi kural aruvit tiruvēṅkaṭattu
eḻil koḷ cōti entai tantai tantaikkē. (III–3–1)

Translation

Serve we shall our Progenitor grand,
Of splendour galore, in Tiruvēṅkaṭam enshrined,
Amid roaring cascades, lovely and rapturous,
With neither break nor blemish, in attendance close.

Notes

(i) *Serve we shall*: Even the mere contemplation of service is good enough. In Śloka 4 of his 'Śrivaikuṇṭa Gaḍya', Śrī Rāmānuja stresses the need for developing, in an ever-increasing measure, the desire for Divine Service.

(ii) *The Lord at Tiruvēṅkaṭam, of Splendour galore*

The Lord in Heaven is like unto the lamp burning in broad day light, with its considerably diminished brightness. Further, His stay there is like feeding the fish with water.

The splendour of the Lord reclining on the blue ocean is literally lost on the blue sea itself, there being hardly a few beneficiaries. On the other hand, the Lord at Tiruvēṅkaṭam is like the lamp shining on the hill-top, in all its brilliance, making Him visible even to the most ignorant among us.

(iii) *Service at all times*

The Āḷvār pines for service at all times, including the days already gone. It sounds rather queer, if not fantastic, that the Āḷvār should seek service in the

irretrievable past as well. What is emphasised here is service of such a high order and efficiency, which will more than make amends for past lapses, drown the Āḻvār in an ocean of bliss and make him desist from brooding over his past omissions, rather render him oblivious of his dereliction in the past.

(iv) *Service without break*

Serving unremittingly the Lord at all places, both inside the Temple and at all places outside where He moves in ceremonial procession. Even when the Lord is screened from public worship by putting a drapery all around, the service should go on, such as tending the lamps, cleaning the vessels meant for containing the sacramental water and so on.

Tiruvaraṅkapperumāḷ Araiyar who recited this song before Lord Raṅganātha, in that grand assemblage in the temple at Śrīraṅgam, is said to have gone into a trance, while reciting the first line of this song, as in the original text, and he went on repeating, "at all times". Evidently, he had got into the mood of the Āḻvār himself, whose passion for Divine Service was so great.

Service without break would also signify service, one after the other, with the same avidity with which Lakṣmaṇa served the Divine Couple, Śrī Rāma and Sītā, during exile. It would also connote selfless service, absolutely free from any tinge of egoism and sense of self-enjoyment, that is, service motivated by the individual soul's own sense of delight and enjoyment, as against service rendered solely for the Lord's delectation.

When Śrī Rāmānuja discoursed on this song, he enquired which of his listeners, in that vast assembly, would like to go to Tiruvēṅkaṭam and render unto the Lord service, as envisaged by the Āḻvār. There was but a solitary response from one Aṉantāḻvāṉ who volunteered his services and sought Śrī Rāmānuja's blessings for the proper fulfilment of the sacred mission. All the others seemed to have got scared of the climatic condition of Tirumalai Hills, frightfully chill, with an unbroken succession of rains. Śrī Rāmānuja embraced Aṉantāḻvāṉ endearingly and exclaimed that he was the one and only male (Āṇpiḷḷai, in Tamil) in that assembly, who was really bold, ready to brave the climate of Tiruvēṅkaṭam. Thence forward, he came to be known as Aṉantaṉpiḷḷai. He went and served at Tiruvēṅkaṭam, to the immense delectation of Lord Śrīnivāsa.

entai tantai tantai tantai tantaikkum
muntai-vāṉavar vāṉavar-kōṉoṭum
cintu pū makiḻum tiruvēṅkaṭattu
antam il pukaḻk kār eḻil aṇṇalē. (III-3-2)

Translation

Of endless glory and exquisite bluish hue,
Our great progenitor first and foremost, dwells in Tiruvēṅkaṭam,
Strewn with crimson flowers of unfailing hue,
Attended by the celestials from heaven and their chieftain.

Notes

(i) To a query why he is rendering service unto the Lord at Tiruvēṅkaṭam when the final goal is service of the Lord in Heaven, the Āḻvār replies that even the Celestials headed by Śrī Śēṉāpati Āḻvār (Cēṉaimutaliyār) come down, in their strength, to serve the Lord at Tiruvēṅkaṭam. That is because of the twin aspects of the Lord, namely, supremacy (Paratva) and simplicity (Saulabhya). The latter can be enjoyed only in Tiruvēṅkaṭam and hence, the Celestials come down here to enjoy that which cannot be experienced in Heaven. Even so, they get swept off their feet by the Lord's amazing simplicity and the garlands, set with colourful flowers, brought by them to be offered to the Lord, drop from their hands unawares but these flowers of Celestial origin do not fade at all.

(ii) *Limitless glory*

The glory of the Lord, comprehended in Heaven by the denizens of the Eternal Land, would seem to be circumscribed, in as much as the 'Nityās' (ever-free angels) and Muktās' (released souls) inhabiting that region, endowed with the transcendent forms are well equipped to partake of all that bliss, emanating from the Lord. On the other hand, in this abode of ours, the Lord is revealing Himself in His Arcā (iconic) form to all and sundry, including wild beasts. His glory in this hallowed land is limitless indeed.

aṇṇal, māyaṉ, aṇi koḷ centāmaraik
kaṇṇaṉ, ceṅkaṉi vāyk karumāṇikkam,
teḷ-niṟai cuṉai nirt tiruvēṅkaṭattu
eṉ il tol pukaḻ vāṉavar īcaṉē. (III–3–3)

Translation

Our wondrous sire at Tiruvēṅkaṭam,
Holding water fed from cascades, pure and plenty,
Shines like the lustrous blue gem,
With lotus eyes and lips, red and radiant, of rare beauty;
Of countless qualities, auspicious and abiding,
He, His sway over the Celestials, is holding.

Notes

(i) Questioned whether the Āḻvār would be able to put through the service unto the Lord at Tiruvēṅkaṭam, as contemplated, the Āḻvār says, with an air of assurance that the Lord is the Supreme Benefactor, making it possible for the Celestials and other numerous highly evolved souls to drink deep of His nectarean beauty in Mount Tiruvēṅkaṭam and He would certainly not deny this benefit to the Āḻvār. Otherwise, how can He live up to His glory as the possessor of innumerable auspicious traits, ever present in Him?

(ii) *Of wondrous beauty*

The radiant eyes, red like lotus flower, stand out foremost and what else is required to beautify Him? The Lord sheds His grace through His eyes and it is but proper that the eyes are mentioned first and next in order, the lips from which He utters words, full of affection for His devotees. Again, it is the bewitching smile on these coral lips, that attracts one and all to Him.

īcaṉ vāṉavarkku eṉpaṉ; eṉṟāl, atu
tēcamō tiruvēṅkaṭattāṉukku?
nīcaṉēṉ; niṟaivu oṉṟum ilēṉ-eṉkaṇ
pācam vaitta param cuṭarc cōtikkē. (III–3–4)

Translation

Would it at all redound to His great glory
Were I to call, as (mere) Lord of Heaven, Him
That shines in all splendour at Tiruvēṅkaṭam,
And fondles me, the lowliest of the lowly?

Note

In the preceding song, the Lord was referred to as the Chief of the Celestials, granting audience to them at Tiruvēṅkaṭam. And now, the Āḻvār feels that it would be a gross understatement of His real greatness which lies in the condescending grace with which He mixes with the monkeys and hunters in Tirumalai Hills and what is even more, the profusion of love extended to one, as low as the Āḻvār. This self-abnegation assuming the lowest depths of humility (c.f. Āḷavantār's self—denunciation in śloka 62 of Stotra-Ratna) only heightens the glory of the Lord. As a matter of fact, if He were merely the Lord of the Celestials in Heaven, His glory stands circumscribed, that is, confined to that region alone. It is only here, against the background of the darkness and nescience we present, that His glory can shine in all its splendour. Not by His might and majesty, surrounded by the Angels in Heaven and unapproachable to us, is He great but by His loving grace

and great concern for us, deep down here, sunk in sorrow. Thus and thus alone can He be God indeed.

cōti āki, ellā ulakum tolum
ātimūrtti enrāl, alavu ākumō-
vētiyar mulu vētattu amutattai,
tītu il cīrt tiruvēṅkaṭattāṉaiyē? (III-3-5)

Translation

How dare I circumscribe the glory
Of the immaculate Lord at Tiruvēṅkaṭam,
Venerated by all the worlds, resplendent and hoary,
Nectarean essence of all Vedic texts, chanted by scholars of great fame?

Notes

(i) *The Lord, venerated by all the worlds*

The Āḷvār says that he cannot circumscribe the glory of the Lord by telling that He is venerated by all the worlds. As a matter of fact, he has not said so earlier. But it is implied by the fact that even he, the lowliest of the lowly, worships Him. When it is said that the bottom-most boy in the class has got through the examination, does it not follow that all the others above him have passed? When the swollen waters of the river have submerged the top-most foot-step, it goes without saying that all the steps below have also been submerged.

(ii) *The Immaculate Lord*

The Lord is the repository of all auspicious qualities and is blemishless. He could be free from blemishes only when He makes Himself accessible to the lowliest of the lowly. In His search for one such, He couldn't get at any one worse than Āḷvār unto whom He has extended His grace despite all his drawbacks. And now, He keeps standing at Tiruvēṅkaṭam, ever on the look-out for one even more heinous than the Āḷvār, to shed His grace upon. It is this greatness

of the Lord that the Āḷvār extols in this Song with characteristic humility.

vēm, kaṭaṅkaḷ meymēl viṉai muṟṟavum;
tāṅkaḷ taṅkaṭku nallaṉavē ceyvār-
vēṅkaṭattu uṟaivārkku nama eṉṉal-
ām kaṭamaiatu cumantārkaṭkē. (III-3-6)

Translation

Inclination for selfless service into Vēṅkaṭattuṟaivār (He that dwells in Vēṅkaṭam),
Shall our past sins burn down as well as those yet to come;
(With the dawn of favour thus conferred)
The devout shall in such wholesome service persevere.

Notes

(i) This song is the sequel to the first song of this decad where mention was made of rendering every kind of service to the Lord at Tiruvēṅkaṭam, without break or blemish. Asked how it would at all be possible to render such service, when the sins operate as serious impediments, the Āḷvār clarifies that the mere contemplation of service unto the Lord will root out all sins committed so far as well as those likely to rear up their ugly heads in the days to come, by reason of our material contacts and ensure unremitting service, in a wholesome spirit. But then, it might be asked how the accumulated heaps of sins of ages could be destroyed by a simple gesture, as above. Śrī Bhaṭṭārya set at naught this doubt through the following illustration:

Śrī Rāma sought the help of the king of the ocean to bund the sea and cross over to Laṅkā, lying prostrate in front of the ocean, for full three days, with due austerity. When the king of the ocean failed to present himself, Śrī Rāma got enraged and was about to drive a shaft into the bosom of the ocean, threatening to dry it up. Struck with terror, the king of the ocean appeared instantly and made his obeisance. The king of the ocean

having thus capitualated and come to terms, Śrī Râma was pacified. He not only generously pardoned the king but made the extraordinary gesture of asking him to indicate where his enemies were, so that the bow lifted against him could vent its fury on his enemies. Śrī Rāma's bow was never lifted in vain, and the arrow sped in the direction of the target, pointed out by the king of the ocean, to vanquish his enemies.

In 'Viṣṇu Sahasranâma', there are, *inter alia,* two names of the Lord, viz., 'Stavyaḥ' and 'Stavapriyaḥ'. The first means that the Lord is praiseworthy and each one of His several attributes would faithfully depict the Lord. 'Stavapriyaḥ' means one, who is pleased with the praise showered on Him, in any form or language, correctly worded or not. And so, with all our limitations, even the feeble praise from our feeble tongues endears us to the Lord, Who overlooks all our faults and sins and regards us, in an ample measure.

(ii) Would it be necessary to do hard labour to get rid of our Sins? Not at all; all that is needed is loving service, rendered disinterestedly, befitting one's station in life and conforming to one's essential nature (swarūpa). Even the simple word 'namaḥ' (I don't belong to myself but to you), uttered by the devotee, is deemed by the over-generous Lord as very weighty indeed and He cuts out all the sins of the devotee and puts him on the path of unremitting Divine Service.

cumantu mā malar, nīr cuṭar tūpam koṇṭu,
amarntu vāṉavar vāṉavar-kōṉoṭum
namaṉṟu eḻum tiruvēṅkaṭam-naṅkaṭkuc
camaṉ koḷ vīṭu tarum taṭaṅ kuṉṟamē. (III–3–7)

Translation

By itself, Tiruvēṅkaṭam, that august mountain
Where do repair the Celestials with their chieftain

And worship with choice flowers, water, lamp and incense,
Shall unto us grant the blissful emancipation (the eternal service).

Notes

(i) "For securing the uninterrupted service in the Eternal Land we pine for, the good offices of the holy mountain, Tiruvēṅkaṭam, will do. It would be hardly necessary for us to propitiate Lord Śrīnivāsa (enshrined there), in this behalf" says the Āḻvār.

(ii) The adjective 'Choice', in the third line, qualifies not only the flowers but also water and incense, meaning the best of each kind. The excellence of the material offered, however, lies not in its physical quality but in the devotion with which it is offered. Did not the Lord say, in Bhagavad Gītā (IX-27), as follows?

"Whosoever shall offer Me, in faith and love, a leaf, a flower, a fruit, water poured forth, that offering, lovingly made with pious will, I do accept".

The following illustration will drive home this point.

On one occasion, some princes had a desire to offer Lord Jagannātha at Pūri (in Orissa), Campaka flowers, said to be His favourite. Going to the flower-market, they found that the flowers had been sold out and there was but a solitary flower left. This gave rise to keen competition among the princes and they went on bidding till one of them staked his entire fortune and bought the flower. The flower was offered by the Prince to the Lord who appeared in his dream that night and exclaimed that the debt of his flower was indeed too heavy for Him, thereby signifying His gracious acceptance of the sincerely made offering which was even beyond His capacity to repay!

(iii) The term 'Celestials' has been used comprehensively so as to include besides the Nityasūrīs, (the ever-free angels in heaven), Brahmā and other Devas. Although

Brahmā and other Devas do not serve the Lord disinterestedly but always seek favours from Him for their own selfish ends, yet, the Āḻvār is charitable enough and invests them with his own bent of mind, painting them also as selfless, like him.

kuṉṟam ēntik kuḷir maḻai kāttavaṉ,
aṉṟu ñālam aḷanta pirāṉ, paraṉ
ceṉṟu cēr tiruvēṅkaṭa mā malai
oṉṟumē toḻa nam viṉai ōyumē. (III–3–8)

Translation

Worship we shall Tiruvēṅkaṭam, the halo'd mountain,
Favourite resort of the Benefactor great, who repelled the chill rains,
Holding mount (Govardhana) aloft and who the worlds did once span;
That's enough to extricate us from all our sins.

Note

Here again, the over-riding importance of the Sacred Mount vis-a-vis the Lord enshrined there, is emphasised. Mount Tiruvēṅkaṭam thus becomes the goal or destination of the Lord and His devotees alike. If it was Mount Govardhana during the Lord's incarnation as Śrī Kṛṣṇa that shielded the subjects of Gokula it is now Mount Tiruvēṅkaṭam that operates as the Saviour, during His Arcā (Iconic) manifestation.

ōyum mūppup piṟappu iṟappu: piṇi
vīyumāṟu ceyvāṉ tiruvēṅkaṭattu
āyaṉ nāḷ-malar ām aṭittāmarai
vāyuḷḷum maṉattuḷḷum vaippārkaṭkē. (III–3–9)

Translation

The shepherd (Kṛṣṇa) who dwells in Tiruvēṅkaṭam,
Rids those, who meditate and sing the praise
Of His Comely feet, dainty as lotus, in fresh bloom,
Of fatiguing old age, birth, death and pestilence.

Notes

(i) In the preceding song, Mount Tiruvēṅkaṭam was said to deliver the goods. And now, it is said that even a part of it, namely, Lord Śrīnivāsa, will do the job. C.F. Tirumaṅkai Āḻvār's reference to Lord Śrīnivāsa, in Periya Tirumoḻi,........., .., as the crest of the northern hill (Vaṭa māmalai ucci).

(ii) The Lord enshrined in Tiruvēṅkaṭam derives importance from His association with the Sacred Mount (Tirumalai) and hence the latter is our destined goal (Āṟāyirappaṭi).

vaitta nāḷ varai ellai kuṟukic ceṉṟu,
eyttu, iḷaippataṉ muṉṉam aṭaimiṉō!
paitta pāmpu-aṇaiyāṉ tiruvēṅkaṭam
moytta cōlai moy pūn taṭan tāḻvarē. (III–3–10)

Translation

Better reach the sacred precincts of Tiruvēṅkaṭam.
With orchards many and a cluster of tanks,
Where stays the Lord whose bed is the serpent,
With outstretched hoods, ere your life's quantum
Draws to a close and your health badly shrinks.

Notes

(i) The Āḻvār exhorts us to take to the enchanting Tiruvēṅkaṭam, as the final goal. The All-Merciful Lord has indeed dowered on us life and limbs to help us move about and worship the Lord in His Iconic manifestation, in the various pilgrim centres like Tiruvēṅkaṭam and render unto Him every possible service. But, alas! we dissipate our lives and energies, in several ungodly pursuits, till, one day, old age and the attendant infirmity overtake us unawares and badly impair our mobility.

(ii) This song also stresses the grandeur of Tiruvēṅkaṭam which has attracted the Lord despite His having

Ādiśeṣa, the posh bed, highly delectable. Again, from the point of view of the devotees, it is equally attractive and if only they would care to go there ere old age catches them in its unrelenting grip, they could render service unto the Lord with great ease, absolutely free from fatigue, in that exhilarating environment.

tāḷ parappi maṇ-tāviya īcaṉai
nīḷ poḻil-kurukūrc caṭakōpaṉ col
kēḷ il āyirattu ip pattum vallavar
vāḻvar vāḻvu eyti ñālam pukaḻavē. (III-3-11)

Translation

Those that recite these songs ten of peerless excellence,
Out of the thousand sung by Caṭakōpaṉ of lovely Kurukūr,
Adoring Īcaṉ (Lord), who spanned the universe, shall acquire
World-wide fame and (everlasting) opulence.

Notes

(i) This decad sings the glory of the Lord at Tiruvēṅkaṭam and yet, it has been made out, in this end-stanza, that the decad extols the greatness of the Lord, Who, in His incarnate form as Tṛvikrama, spanned the entire universe. Our great Ācāryas hold that there is perfect identity between these two forms of the Lord. The Lord keeps standing at Tiruvēṅkaṭam to secure all His subjects under His patronising feet and so did Tṛvikrama, setting His feet on all and sundry, without distinction of high and low, rich and poor, Saint and debauchee. The Lord at Tiruvēṅkaṭam is also quite at home with the hunters and monkeys.

(ii) *Everlasting opulence*: This denotes the eternal service in Heaven, both body and mind being lovingly attuned to it.

Third Centum—Fourth Decad (III-4)
(Pukaḻum nal oruvaṉ)

Preamble

In the preceding decad, the Āḻvār was all agog to serve the Lord, at all times and in every conceivable manner, without break or blemish. Profoundly impressed by the intensity of the Āḻvār's yearning for Divine service, the Lord very much wished to make his task easy and so threw into focus His unique faculty of omnipresence, *pervading all things, all over* and *at all times.* Coming face to face with the Lord's immense ubiquity in various forms, the Āḻvār was in the same predicament as the one gathering the fruits dropped down the trees in a violent gale, finding it difficult to pick and choose. The phenomenon before him was so amazing and of such astounding dimensions that the Āḻvār, who resorted to singing the Lord's glory (which is also a form of service, namely, service by word of mouth—Vācika Kaiṅkarya), just didn't know where to begin and what to say. It is the Lord's immanence that the Āḻvār attempted to sing about, in this decad.

One of the Lord's several names is 'Ananta', the endless. He is limitless and immeasurable, not being circumscribed by space and time. The unique feature about the Supreme Lord, Mahāviṣṇu is that He is not only not circumscribed by space and time but He also abides in all, without any exception, the sentient beings and non-sentient things, one and all, constituting, as it were, His bodies. This is, in fact, the keynote of Viśiṣṭādvaita philosophy. The 'Śarīra-Śarīri bhāva'. This was mentioned in passing, in the first decad of the first centum itself. And now, this is being elaborated upon, in this decad.

pukaḻum nal oruvaṉ eṉkō? poru il cīrp pūmi eṉkō?
tikaḻum taṇ paravai eṉkō? tī eṉkō? vāyu eṉkō?
nikaḻum ākācam eṉkō? nīḷ cuṭar iraṇṭum eṉkō?
ikaḻvu il iv aṉaittum eṉkō?-kaṇṇaṉaik kūvum āṟē. (III-4-1)

Translation

How shall I speak of Kaṇṇaṉ, (my all-pervading Lord)?
Shall I say, He is the one by all sacred texts adored
Or shall I describe Him as peerless Earth or Ocean bright?

Could I say He is fire or air or the space athwart,
Or the Sun and the Moon, rather their aggregate?

Note

The Āḷvār looks on, in bewildering amazement, when the Lord presents Himself as an embodiment of the elements that have gone into the making of the universe and its multifarious contents, His auspicious qualities also shining forth, side by side. Unlike others who could see everything in its outer form only, the Āḷvār discerns the Lord in each and everything, and nothing can, therefore, be eschewed by him as being disagreeable. He sees the Lord in every thing, individually and in the aggregate. What would seem despicable in the light of one's own association, becomes wholly agreeable, viewed in the light of their conjunction with the Lord. (aphorism 149, Ācārya Hṛdayam).

kūvum āṟu aṟiyamāṭṭēṉ: kuṉṟaṅkaḷ aṉaittum eṉkō?
mēvu cīr māri eṉkō? viḷaṅku tārakaikaḷ eṉkō?
nā iyal kalaikaḷ eṉkō? ñāṉa nal āvi eṉkō?-
pāvu cīrk kaṇṇaṉ, emmāṉ, paṅkayak kaṇṇaṉaiyē. (III-4-2)

Translation

I know not what to call kaṇṇaṉ, my lotus-eyed Lord,
Of qualities great and vast; could He be called
The aggregate of all mountains or the rains lovely
Or the bright stars or all that learning by the tongue cultivated
Or sweet sounds pregnant with meanings lofty ?

Notes

(i) In this song, the Āḷvār sees the Lord in the several products of the various elements, referred to, in the previous song. Thus, the lotus—eyed Lord is also seen as the mountain range. It is the earth (Pṛtvi) that hardens into mountains, providing, in turn, stable support to the former. The rains pertain to the element known as water. Pleasant to behold, the rains provide all facilities to the denizens of the world and the rain-clouds are also comparable to the Lord's complexion. The bright stars owe their structure, composition and luminosity to the element of fire, while all that knowledge imparted by word of mouth is rendered possible by the element called air. Transmission of sound is effected through the medium of space (ākāśa). If sound is looked upon as the body, knowledge is its soul. Sound becomes worth its while only when it conveys the right meanings and nourishes the soul with the right type of knowledge.

(ii) It only bespeaks the unlimited glory of the Lord and the immeasurable extent of His possessions, if even Saint Nammāḷvār, endowed with full and complete knowledge by the Supreme Lord Himself, should fumble and falter, unable to give adequate expression to the Lord's attributes and acquisitions, His flooding fame etc.

paṅkayak kaṇṇaṉ eṉkō? pavaḷac cevvāyaṉ eṉkō?
am katir aṭiyaṉ eṉkō? añcaṉa vaṇṇaṉ eṉkō?
ceṅkatir muṭiyaṉ eṉkō? tiru maṟu mārpaṉ eṉkō?
caṅku cakkarattaṉ eṉkō?- cāti māṇikkattaiyē. (III-4-3)

Translation

Shall I call the rare blue gem of a Lord,
The lotus-eyed or the coral-lipped
Or the one with a pair of feet, lovely and bright
Or one dark like collyrium or one that sports
The crown dazzling red or one on whose chest
Are 'Tiru' (Lakṣmī) and Maṟu (Śrīvatsam, the spiral spot)
Or one that wields the conch and the discus?

Notes

(i) In the two preceding stanzas, the Āḷvār described the Lord's universal aspect and now he describes Him, in His own exclusive form. As a matter of fact, the Āḷvār could discern the Lord in both the Universal and Individual forms with the same ease.

(ii) It is indeed interesting to study the sequence set out in the above stanza. The Āḷvār begins with the Lord's

lotus-eyes which shed grace on him and befriended him; next in order is the bewitching smile of the Lord which is an even greater attraction than the Lord's entrancing looks and hence the mention of the coral lips. And now, the Subjects, attracted by the Lord's lovely looks and captivating smile, seek refuge at His comely feet; the votaries then enjoy the charming complexion of the Lord. The Lord's crown, indicative of His overlordship, does not, however, scare them off when they behold the Divine Mother, the grand Intercessor on the Lord's chest. But then, this exquisite conjunction of the Divine couple induces a sense of fear, a growing apprehension in the minds of the devout regarding the safe continuance of this glorious combination but the weapons held by the Lord in His hands, the conch and the discus, dispel this fear and put them at ease.

cāti māṇikkam eṉkō? cavi koḷ poṉ muttam eṉkō?
cāti nal vayiram eṉkō? tavivu il cīr viḷakkam eṉkō?
āti am cōti eṉkō? āti am puruṭaṉ eṉkō?-
ātum il kālattu entai accutaṉ amalaṉaiyē. (III-4-4)

Translation

Shall I say that 'Accutan' is my immaculate Lord
Who fathered me, when forlorn and (ever afterwards)
Held on to me, is the pure gem or the shining gold
Or the ruby flashy or choice diamond or the eternal lamp
Or the One of resplendent form or the blissful Primate?

Notes

(i) Asked by a worldling for tips as to how to remember the Supreme Lord, a knowledgeable elder queried back, "Pray, tell me how to forget God". The Lord is everywhere, stays in all things having name and form and hence the wise men always perceive the Lord's intimate contact and presence in each and everything. That is why the Lord has said in His 'Song Celestial' (X-41) whatever is of superlative eminence contains a special element of His all-conquering power. The Āḻvār, therefore, says that, with a natural, built-in Grace, bliss and beauty, God is the very best of all good things.

(ii) The eternal lamp that God is, He is anterior to all other luminous bodies, like Sun and Moon.

(iii) *Acyuta, the eternal Father*: While in a forlorn state, with no attainment whatever, on his part, to attract the Lord's grace, the Lord, on His own, revealed to the Āḻvār the indissoluble bond subsisting between them, the inviolable 'Father-Son' relationship and held on to him firmly thereafter.

accutaṉ amalaṉ eṉkō? aṭiyavar viṉai keṭukkum
naccum mā maruntam eṉkō? nalaṅ kaṭal amutam eṉkō?
ac cuvaik kaṭṭi eṉkō? aṟu cuvai aṭicil eṉkō?
neyc cuvait tēṟal eṉkō? kaṉi eṉkō? pāl eṉkēṉō? (III-4-5)

Translation

Shall I my Lord, as Accutaṉ (the steadfast) call
Or the Immaculate or high class medicine delectable
That cuts out the devotees' ills and evils
Or the nectar that came up the milk ocean fine or fix
Him as the cream delicious or the meal with tastes six
Or the honey as tasty as ghee or fruit or milk?

Notes

(i) True to the Upaniṣadik text, depicting the Lord as very delicious, the Āḻvār presents the Lord here as all those things that are juicy and appetising.

(ii) *Cutting out the devotees' ills and evils*: The expression 'Ills and evils' is used in a comprehensive sense, covering the effective operation of both 'Puṇya' and 'Pāpa', as the former is a golden fetter and the latter, an iron fetter and thus both are impediments, seeing that a golden fetter is, all the same, a fetter. The Lord, on His part, will not confine Himself to a life of ease and peace, in the high heavens, but come down post-haste

to the rescue of His devotees, as He did in the case of Gajendra, the elephant. Again, the ills He cures are not the ordinary bodily ailments but the much worse malady of the soul. The Lord is, therefore, referred to as the delectable medicine, easy to take and absolutely harmless even if the directions for its use are given the go-by or not closely adhered to.

(iii) The Lord is indeed far superior to the nectar that was obtained by churning the milk ocean. The Lord, the non-satiate nectar, will make Himself available to His beloved devotees without undergoing the rigours of churning the ocean.

pâl eṉkō? nâṉku vētap payaṉ eṉkō? camaya nīti
nūl eṉkō? nuṭaṅku kēḷvi icai eṉkō? ivaṟṟuḷ nalla
mēl eṉkō? viṉaiyiṉ mikka payaṉ eṉkō? kaṇṇaṉ eṉkō?
māl eṉkō? mâyaṉ eṉkō?- vāṉavar âtiyaiyē. (III-4-6)

Translation

Shall I as Milk, (the Lord), foremost among celestials, call
Or as the paramount Vedās four or the Śāstras that reveal
The Vedic religion in proper light
Or as the music enchanting or as one above them all
Or as the fruits many of one's endeavour bright
Or as Kaṇṇaṉ, Māl (Tirumāl), Māyaṉ (the Lord of wondrous deeds and traits)?

Notes

(i) The Lord is the quintessence of the vedās, the supreme authority revealing Him. The Lord has Himself declared, in XV-15 of Bhagavad Gītā, that He alone is denoted by the Vedās, in their entirety.

The Śāstras, referred to, are the sacred texts, such as Itihâsas, Purāṇas etc, which elucidate the moot points in the Vedās and serve as an effective key or guide to the abstruse vedic texts.

(ii) *The wondrous Lord*: The wonder lies in that the Overlord of the Celestials serves His devotees in the humblest

manner, such as running an errand, driving the chariot etc.

(iii) Even as a small quantity of seeds sown produces a rich harvest of grains, the Lord showers on us a plethora of benefits, out of all proportion to the magnitude of our efforts, real or feigned.

vāṉavar āti eṉkō? vāṉavar teyvam eṉkō?
vāṉavar pōkam eṉkō? vāṉavar muṟṟum eṉkō?
ūṉam il celvam eṉkō? ūṉam il cuvarkkam eṉkō?
ūṉam il mōkkam eṉkō?- oḷi maṇi vaṇṇaṉaiyē. (III-4-7)

Translation

Shall I call the lustrous Sire, gem-hued, as the Overlord
Of Celestials or the God Supreme by them adored
Or the One by them enjoyed and their all,
Or the treasure inexhaustible or undying pleasures
Of *Suvarkkam* (Svarga) or *mōkkam* (mokṣa), the bliss eternal?

Notes

(i) '*Celestials*: This denotes, in particular, the 'Nitya Sūris' in Heaven to whom the Lord is the 'Be-all' and 'End-all', the Sole Sustainer.

(ii) *Bliss eternal*: Heaven, the Eternal Land, with its perennial scope for eternal service unto the Lord, as distinguished from the 'Kaivalya' type of Mokṣa or emancipation where the liberated (dis-embodied) Soul denies itself the bliss of Divine Service and gets lost in self-enjoyment.

(iii) While the pleasures of Svarga too, are of a limited tenure at the end of which the individual is hurled down to the Earth, the Lord is referred to in this context, as the everlasting pleasure, not time-bound.

oḷi maṇi vaṇṇaṉ eṉkō? oruvaṉ eṉṟu ētta niṉṟa
naḷir matic caṭaiyaṉ eṉkō? nāṉmukak kaṭavuḷ eṉkō?–
aḷi makiḻntu ulakam ellām paṭaittu, avai ētta, niṉṟa
kaḷi malart tuḷavaṉ, emmāṉ, kaṇṇaṉai, māyaṉaiyē. (III-4-8)

Translation

Could I call Kaṇṇaṉ, my Liege-Lord of wondrous traits and deeds,
Sporting the floral garland of tuḷacī which honey sheds,
Who the worlds did with delight create and is by them adored,
As the lustrous One of sapphire hue or as Śiva, who sports
The cool crescent Moon on matted locks and stands revered
(By his votaries) as the God supreme or as Nāṉmukaṉ (Brahmā, the four-headed)?

Notes

(i) The Āḻvār points out here that Śiva, sporting the cool, crescent Moon on his matted locks, mistakenly revered by some as the Supreme and Brahmā, the four-headed Demi-urge, also form part of Lord Viṣṇu's possessions.

(ii) '*Liege-Lord*': Viṣṇu, who put the Āḻvār on the right track and thereby made him solely worship Him, without straying into the domain of worship of the lesser deities.

kaṇṇaṉai, māyaṉ-taṉṉai, kaṭal kaṭaintu amutam koṇṭa
aṇṇalai, accutaṉai, aṉantaṉai. aṉantaṉ-taṉmēl
naṇṇi naṉku uṟaikiṉṟāṉai, ñālam uṇṭu umiḻnta mālai,
eṉṉum āṟu aṟiyamāṭṭēṉ-yāvaiyum evarum tāṉē. (III-4-9)

Translation

I know not how to comprehend Kaṇṇaṉ, the wondrous Lord,
The glorious Sire, Who the ocean churned and ambrosia delivered,
Accutaṉ (the Protector steadfast) of glory unlimited,
Who on Aṉantaṉ (Serpent) does repose, safe and sound,
Tirumāl (of tender solicitude), who (during deluge) sustained
All th worlds in His stomach and (later) spat them out;
Indeed all things and beings He does Himself constitute.

Note

The Āḻvār who attempted earlier an enumeration of the Lord's cosmic wealth, has now given it up as impossible and rests contented with a summary statement that He is the aggregate of all non-sentient things and sentient beings.

C.F. the Lord's own declaration, in Bhagavad Gītā X-19, that there is no end to the details of things and beings under His control (the vibhūtis).

yāvaiyum evarum tāṉāy, avaravar camayam tōṟum
tōyvu ilaṉ; pulaṉ aintukkum colappaṭāṉ; uṇarviṉ mūrtti;
āvi cēr uyiriṉ uḷḷāl ātum ōr paṟṟu ilāta
pāvaṉai ataṉaik kūṭil, avaṉaiyum kūṭalāmē. (III-4-10)

Translation

Knowledge personified is my Lord who stays within
All things and beings and yet does apart remain
From their weal and woe, much beyond the ken
Of comprehension of the senses five; appreciate you can,
Growth and decay unto the body pertain and not the Soul within,
Stays likewise the Lord inside the Soul (aloof from its weal and woe).

Note

This stanza clearly brings out the fact that the Lord who has stationed Himself inside all things and beings, is not affected by their changing fortunes, weal or woe, even as the Individual Soul occupying a particular body is not affected by the biological changes of growth and decay undergone by the body. But then, it might be argued that the Individual Soul partakes of the pain and pleasure experienced through the medium of the body and on this analogy, the Lord inside all cannot also remain unaffected by such experiences. This doubt can, however, be resolved by contrasting the manner in which the Lord and the Individual Soul got inside the body. Whereas the Individual Soul has occupied the body as the medium appropriate to his or her working out the load of Karma, the Lord gets inside the soul at His volition, for the resuscitation of the subject. The Individual is the convict serving a term of imprisonment inside the prison-house, which the body is, while the Lord is like unto the distinguished jail visitor, contemplating the ways and means of welfare and rehabilitation of the prisoners.

The above is the interpretation of Emperumāṉār (Rāmānuja); the other interpretation, namely, exclusive devotion unto the Lord (Super Soul) inside the individual Soul, will enable the latter to attain the former has been brushed aside by him as a misfit, in the present context of highlighting the immanence of the Lord, where it is imperative to bring out that the Lord pervades all things and beings without, at the same time, partaking of their character.

kūṭi vaṇṭu aṟaiyum taṇ tārk koṇṭal pōl vaṇṇaṉ-taṉṉai
māṭu alar poḻil-kurukūr vaṇ caṭakōpaṉ coṉṉa
pāṭal ōr āyirattuḷ ivaiyum ōr pattum vallār
vīṭu ila pōkam eyti virumpuvar amarar moyttē. (III-4-11)

Translation

Those that are well versed in these songs ten,
Out of the peerless thousand sung by gracious caṭakōpaṉ
Of Kurukūr, amid blooming orchards many, in adoration
Of the cloud-hued Lord, sporting cool tuḷaci garland,
The gay resort of honey bees, will the heaven ascend
And eternal service enjoy, becoming the Celestials' favourites.

Notes

(i) *Gracious caṭakōpaṉ*: The Āḻvār's grace lies not in his seeing the Lord, in all things and beings, but in his making us also realise it, through these songs.

(ii) The Nitya Sūris (Celestials in Heaven) love those that recite these ten songs. This is because of their great love and regard for the Āḻvār who possesses Divine knowledge on a par with them, despite his location down below in this land of darkness and nescience.

Third Centum—Fifth Decad (III-5)
(Moym mām pūm poḻil)

Preamble

In the last decad, we saw the Āḻvār enjoying the Lord's immanence in quite a marvellous way. So ecstatic and love-

smitten did he become on beholding the Lord's 'Vibhūti', vast and varied, immense and interesting, defying description, that he was thrown into the rapturous state of singing and dancing. One has only to witness a Saint in his moments of rapturous ravishment in union with God, moments when his whole being thrills with love and his eyes swim with the pearls of tears of delight. This also reflects the behaviour of the exalted denizens of the high heavens, who drink deep incessantly from that inexhaustible fountain of bliss, the Lord. No wonder then, Sage Nārada and other celestial bards always dance as they sing, and sing as they dance, in the immediate presence of the Lord, completely swayed by God-love of extraordinary intensity. As a matter of fact, the hands and feet as well as the other limbs, graciously dowered on us by the Lord, can prove their worth only in this way. Naturally, the Āḻvār felt disappointed, rather distressed when he found that, barring a handful, the bulk of the worldlings around was very far from such intoxicating God-love. While he is all praises for the few kindred souls, he is unsparing in his condemnation of the otherwise. This provides the theme of this decad.

In the second decad of this centum, the Āḻvār was in dire distress but the gloom was dispelled by the joy of contemplation of unremitting service unto the Lord at Tiruvēṅkaṭam, the meeting ground of the Celestials and the Earthly men. (III-3). In the fourth decad, the Āḻvār's joy knew no bounds, as we have just seen. To the superficial observer, such alternating moods of the Āḻvār may seem objectionable in as much as they appear to come into conflict with the general principles laid down for the pursuit of the discipline, known as 'Bhakti'. Of the seven steps leading to 'Bhakti', the first is 'Viveka' and the last two are 'anavasādaḥ' (non-depression) and 'anuddharsaḥ' (non-elation). The practicians of 'Bhakti' are prohibited from getting unduly depressed or unduly elated. These prohibitions, however, apply only to material things of the mundane world under the impact of physical pain and pleasure, commonly experienced by the Souls in bondage. These injunctions cannot contain the ultra-mundane happiness of the Saints and other Godly men resulting from their constant communion with the Lord and joyful contemplation of His wondrous trails and deeds or their grief arising from the aloofness of the worldlings from God-thirst and God-hunger.

moym mām pūm poḷil-poykai mutalaic ciṟaippaṭṭu niṉṟa
kaimmāvukku aruḷ ceyta kār mukil pōl vaṇṇaṉ, kaṇṇaṉ,
emmāṉaic collip pāṭi, eḻuntum paṟantum tuḷḷātār-
tammāl karumam eṉ? collīr, taṉ kaṭal vaṭṭattu uḷḷīrē!
(III-5-1)

Translation

Ye, men of Earth, bound by the cool oceanic waters!
Tell me what use there can be of those creatures
Who sing not the glory of Kaṇṇaṉ, our cloud-hued Lord,
Who rescued (Gajendra) the elephant that stood ensnared
By a crocodile in the pond amid orchards dense
And leap about and dance in gay abandon, with devotion intense.

Notes

(i) Unto him, who remains unmoved by the good turn done by the Lord to Gajendra, the pious elephant in dire distress, his very birth is a terrible waste.

(ii) *The pond amid dense orchards*: In the forest inhabited by Gajendra, the pious elephant, who made history in the world of devotion, all the lotus tanks had gone dry, due to scarcity of rains. This put a grievous stop to the daily offering of lotus flowers by the elephant to the Deity and as such, empty days rolled on, the elephant grew restless and went hither and thither, in search of lotus flowers. Scenting his way through, at long last, he came up to a hill-top where he sighted a lovely pond, studded with lotus flowers, surrounded by a nice cluster of gardens. In his eagerness to pluck the flowers and resume the diurnal worship, long discontinued, the elephant just lost sight of a crocodile lying across and got trapped by the fell adversary. On hearing the alarum raised by the elephant after a titanic struggle with its grim opponent, the Lord rushed to the pond, post-haste, rescued the elephant from the spacious jaws of the crocodile and caressed the wounds on its leg.

(iii) While discoursing on this Song, Śrī Parāśara Bhaṭṭar is said to have painfully observed, as follows :

> We are here, at this end, to remain unmoved by the multifarious good done to us by the Lord and He is there, at the other end, to get concerned about every little mishap that befalls us. This sets out in sharp contrast, our callous indifference to Him and His tender solicitude for us.

taṉ kaṭal vaṭṭattu uḷḷārait tamakku iraiyāt taṭintu uṇṇum
tiṇ kaḷal-kāl acurarkkut tiṅku iḻaikkum tirumālaip
paṅkaḷ talaikkoḷḷap pāṭi, paṟantum kuṉittum uḷalātār
maṇ koḷ ulakil piṟappār, valviṉai mōta malaintē. (III-5-2)

Translation

Those that sing not tunefully the glory
Of Tirumāl, who does on the Asurās gory,
That kill and eat up the denizens of this Earth,
Bound by the oceans cool, pour all His wrath,
Tormenting them and fail to leap about and dance in gay-abandon
Will in this sinful world get trapped, (again and again).

Notes

(i) The Āḻvār deplores those who do not recognise the enormous good done to them by the Lord, by way of protecting them from the devilish. Failure on their part to gratefully acknowledge the Lord's benefaction will only get them consigned to Samsāra, the breeding ground for sins and the resultant miseries and involvement in the dreadful cycle of birth and death.

(ii) By 'Asuras' is not meant those born in the Asura clan. As a matter of fact, the two broad classifications, indicated by Lord Kṛṣṇa in Chapter XVI-6 of Bhagavad Gītā, are 'Devas', the Divine and 'Asuras', the Devilish. Whosoever renders service to the Lord and His devotees or co-operates with those who render

such service is the 'Divine' while those who range themselves opposite and hate God and His devotees and obstruct the service rendered to them, are the 'Devilish'. Even Lakṣmī, who is Grace personified and knows not what it is to punish (ajñātha nigrahai), is one with the Lord, in the matter of inflicting punishment on the 'Devilish'.

malaiyai eṭuttu, kal-māri kāttu, pacunirai-taṉṉait
tolaivu tavirtta pirāṉaic collic colli, niṉṟu eppōtum,
talaiyiṉōṭu ātaṉam taṭṭat taṭukuṭṭamāyp paṟavātār
alai koḷ narakattu aḻuntik kiṭantu uḻaikkiṉṟa vampare.
(III-5-3)

Translation

Those that do not spell, again and again,
The glory of the Lord who held aloft the mountain
And from the fury of stony rain saved the cattle
And leap about for ever, upside down and in joy rattle,
Are but duds destined to drudge in the dismal hell.

Note

Even remaining unresponsive to the great gesture of the Lord, His acts of grace galore and the resultant failure to laud Him and leap about with joy would be tantamount to entry into hell and these are the very persons eagerly sought after by yama's hordes for being despatched to hell.

vampu aviḻ kōtaiporuṭṭa, māl viṭai ēḻum aṭartta
cempavaḷat tiraḷ vāyaṉ, ciṟitaraṉ tol pukaḻ pāṭi,
kumpiṭu naṭṭam iṭṭu āṭi, kōku ukaṭṭuṇṭu uḻalātār-
tam piṟappāl payaṉ eṉṉē cātu caṉaṅkaḷiṭaiyē? (III-5-4)

Translation

Of what use are those born amidst the devout pure and pious,
That sing not and jump not, running riot,
Adoring the coral-lipped ciṟītaraṉ's glory great,
His taming of the unruly bulls seven for winning the hand
Of the Bride (Nappiṉṉai) wearing the highly fragrant garland?

Notes

(i) The Āḻvār is vexed with those indifferent sinners, born in the midst of the 'Sātvik Souls' (good and pure), not losing themselves in ecstatic adoration of the glory, of Lord Kṛṣṇa who tamed, all at once, seven unruly bulls and won Nappiṉṉai, the charming bride, niece of Queen Yaśodā.

(ii) *Coral—lipped Ciṟītaraṉ*: The red lips of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, rendered all the more enchanting by His bewitching smile of victory over the unruly bulls.

(iii) Śrī Piḷḷaippiḷḷai, a disciple of kūrattāḻvāṉ, drew up the following contrasting picture, to illustrate the phraseology "persons born in the midst of the 'Sātvik' (pure and pious people), used in this song.

Near the holy tank, Candra puṣkaraṇi, within the precincts of the temple of Lord Raṅganātha in Śrīraṅgam, there is the sacred Puṉṉai tree. Under the shade of this tree, the religious Pundits used to give learned discourses to the handful of devout listeners, squeezed in the little space available in the passage around, in rapt attention. There would, of course, be no objection to a further influx of like-minded listeners, keen and receptive, adding to the congestion. But see how odd and irksome it would be, if the hefty villagers with their hairy, humpy shoulders, pot-bellies and headgears, passing along, thrust themselves in, out of sheer curiosity, and elbow the pious listeners out.

cātu caṉattai naliyum kañcaṉaic cātippataṟku,
āti am cōti uruvai aṅku vaittu, iṅkup piṟanta
vēta mutalvaṉaip pāṭi, vītikaḷ tōṟum tuḷḷātār
ōti uṇarntavar muṉṉā eṉ cavippār maṉicarē? (III-5-5)

Translation

Not all their learning and mumblings dry will make them men,
If they dance not in the open streets, love-smitten
And sing not the glory of the Lord, by Vedas acclaimed

As the foremost, who did in all that supernal splendour descend
From the high heavens, to kill Kañcaṉ, the tyrant
Who did the soft and pious men torment.

Notes

(i) In the preceding decad the Āḻvār enjoyed the Vibhūtis collectively, being the Lord's controlled possessions. But now he differentiates between the Lord's subjects; he is all praises for those love-drunk and love-smitten possessing enormous God-hunger and God-thirst like himself but condemns unreservedly those who are not charged with such God-love. The Āḻvār has no hesitation in declaring the massive learning and ritualistic, prosaic exercises in mumblings and genuflections, palmed off as prayers by those in the latter category, as wholly futile.

(ii) The Lord's incarnations and the herculean deeds performed by Him during those incarnations, were due to the unpardonable sins committed by Kamsa and other demoniac forces, by way of teasing and tormenting the pious and the pure, like Vasudeva and Devakī. Whereas the Lord is least mindful of direct affront thrown at Him, He gets furious when His devotees are offended and He will never exercise His proverbial clemency, in respect of such grievous offenders. Those who comprehend the Lord's enormous love for His devotees cannot but throw off all their sophistication and conventional formalities and leap about and dance like mad men, in the streets, big and small, singing His great glory. It would be appropriate to mention the following anecdote, in this context.

The king built a cluster of houses for presentation to the poor. He was, however, very much averse to Vaiṣṇavites and so, he flatly declined to hand over one of the houses to Miḷakāḻvāṉ, a Vaiṣṇava, when approached by the latter for the grant. The supplicant, however, wanted to know from the king the grounds, on which the grant was negatived. The king bluntly replied: "No doubt, you are worthy, in other respects, but as a Vaiṣṇava and a disciple of Śrī Rāmānuja, you stand disqualified." So great was Miḷakāḻvāṉ's love of his religion and his great Preceptor, that he exclaimed: 'Oh, is that so? I am mighty glad, you recognise me as a Vaiṣṇava although I thought I was not worthy of being called as one. "So saying, he gathered up his garment, threw it up in the air and danced with joy.

maṇicarum maṟṟum muṟṟum āy, māyap piṟavi piṟanta
taṉiyaṉ piṟappili-taṉṉai, taṭaṅ kaṭal-cērnta pirāṉai,
kaṉiyai, karumpiṉ iṉ cāṟṟai, kaṭṭiyai, tēṉai, amutai
muṉivu iṉṟi ēttik kuṉippār muḻutu uṇar nīrmaiyiṉārē.
(III-5-6)

Translation

Perfect knowledge vests in those that dance
And sing with great joy the glory of the Lord,
The delicious fruit, candy, honey and Cane-juice,
The nectar grand, reclining on the milk-ocean broad,
Who, birthless though, did come down in many ways,
Now as man, then as Deva and so on, wondrous and peerless.

Notes

(i) The Lord is birthless in the sense that He is not, by any means, involved like us, in the inevitable cycle of birth and rebirth, eking out the results of our good and bad actions. And yet, He incarnates many times and in many ways out of His own free will, assuming the form most appropriate to the particular occasion and purpose. Those who go into raptures in contemplation of these beneficent Avatāra of the highly delicious Lord, could indeed be deemed to have assimilated the quintessence of all learning.

(ii) *Reclining on the milk-ocean*: This refers to the 'Vyūha' aspect of the Lord reclining on the milky ocean, the centre of creative activity, where the Lord contem-

plates the ways and means of reclaiming us all from the ocean of Samsāra—birth and bondage.

(iii) With all their massive learning, if people are not visibly moved by the Lord's auspicious traits and do not take a deep plunge into them, they should indeed be deemed ignorant. On the other hand, those that are not conversant with any of the Śāstras but get into the region of ecstasy, entranced mentally, orally and physically, by the Lord's auspicious traits and wondrous deeds, are virtually all—knowing.

nīrmāi il nūṟṟuvar vīya, aivarkku aruḷceytu niṉṟu,
pār malku cēṉai avitta parañcuṭarai niṉaintu āṭi,
nīr malku kaṇṇiṉar āki, neñcam kuḻaintu naiyātē,
ūṉ malki, mōṭu paruppār uttamarkaṭku eṉ ceyvārē?
(III-5-7)

Translation

Of what use unto the devout are they
That are fat and pot-bellied, who melt not
In ecstasy, singing and dancing with tears of joy,
Meditating on the resplendent Lord Supreme Who did blot
The cruel hundred out and on (their cousins) five shed His grace
Routing the armies and ridding Earth of unwholesome populace?

Note

The 'Kauravas' (the cruel hundred) would just not allow their five cousins, the Pāṇḍavas, to co-exist. The Lord had, therefore, to annihilate such terribly hostile cousins of the Pāṇḍavas and, in the process, He got the Earth rid of its unwholesome burden. Crores of Sādhus would, by no means, be a burden to Mother Earth to whom they are just as light as cotton, but the sinners press too heavily on her. The Āḻvār deplores the conduct of those remaining unmoved by the Lord's enormous grace. shown to His devotees as above. These hapless men seem to have been born just to make their poor mothers suffer the pangs of labour. It is a pity such men cannot be of any use to

the devout Vaiṣṇavas at whose beck and call the Lord and all His possessions ever remain. While on this subject, the following episode will be interesting and instructive:

In the court of a Cōḷa Rājā, Periya Nampi, Śri Rāmānuja's preceptor, had to undergo mortification owing to his refusal to subscribe to the slogan raised by the King and his men, "Śiva is the Supreme God". Some of these men, however, wanted to claim the merit which accrues by cremating the uncared-for corpses of the destitute and rushed to the scene of death of Periya Nampi. But they shrank back, when they saw the illustrious Kūrattāḻvāṉ by the side of that great Ācārya. Kūrattāḻvāṉ admonished them by saying, "You fellows can hardly find a single destitute Vaiṣṇava by cremating whom you seem to be in for cheap merit. You should all know that the Lord and all His worlds are there to subserve the Vaiṣṇavas at all times".

vār puṉal am taṇ aruvi vaṭa tiruvēṅkaṭattu entai
pēr pala collip pitaṟṟi, pittar eṉṟē piṟar kūṟa,
ūr pala pukkum pukātum, ulōkar cirikka niṉṟu āṭi,
ārvam perukik kuṉippār amarar toḻappaṭuvārē. (III-5-8)

Translation

Those that articulate, with yearning deep, the names many
Of our Lord in Vaṭa Tiruvēṅkaṭam, with its fountains many
And cool, nice cascades, pass in and out of many a town,
Singing and dancing in ecstasy like mad men,
By worldlings ridiculed, will be worshipped by those in heaven.

Note

The Āḻvār extols those who worship the Lord in His Arcā form at the various pilgrim centres, like Tiruvēṅkaṭam, despite their being steeped in 'Samsāra' in an abode notorious for its nescience. These men the Āḻvār would like to place in a category even above those exalted Souls in Heaven. Seeing that the Supreme Lord in His Arcā form wherein converge all auspicious attributes in unlimited measure, is near at hand, easily accessible, these men go into a trance and keep on singing and dancing with wild

joy, moving round towns and villages, completely absorbed in devotion. While the worldlings callously look on with wonder and amusement, as they do in the case of mad men, even the Nitya Sūrīs, the ever-free angels in heaven, adore these devotees on Earth running riot with God-love. (The episode relating to Mīḷakāḷvāṉ, cited in the notes below III—5—5, could be recapitulated here as well.)

amarar toḻappaṭuvāṉai, aṉaittu ulakukkum pirāṉai,
amara maṉattiṉuḷ yōku puṇarntu, avaṉ-taṉṉōṭu oṉṟu āka
amarat tuṉiya vallārkaḷ oḻiya, allātavar ellām
amara niṉaintu, eḻuntu, āṭi, alaṟṟuvatē karumamē. (III-5-9)

Translation

Leaving the perverts alone who deem themselves on a par
With the Lord, in *Amarars'* hearts embedded, Sovereign Master
Of all the worlds, it behoves the rest to meditate and sing
His glory great, moving round in ecstasy, leaping and dancing.

Note

It is a great pity that the 'Kevalas' who develop their psychic powers and feel themselves on a par with the Supreme Lord in the final state of liberation, get lost in self-enjoyment, totally oblivious of the infinitely superior bliss of Divine Service perennially enjoyed by the '*Amarars*', the immortals, in the Yonder heaven. Leaving these unfortunate souls severely alone, the Āḻvār says it is the duty of all the others to deeply meditate upon the Lord's auspicious traits, with selfless dedication, and sing His great glory all over the place, going about leaping and dancing.

karumamum karuma palaṉum ākiya kāraṇaṉ-taṉṉai,
tiru maṇi vaṇṇaṉai, ceṅkaṇ māliṉai, tēvapirāṉai
orumai maṉattiṉuḷ vaittu, uḷḷam kuḻaintu, eḻuntu, āṭi,
perumaiyum nāṇum tavirntu, pitaṟṟumiṉ, pētaimai tīrntē!
(III-5-10)

Translation

Shed all your conceit, sense of shame and ignorance
And leap about, uttering with ecstatic incoherence,

The names of the gem-hued, red lotus-eyed Tirumāl, the Ordainer
Of the Universe, the deeds and their fruits, Chief of Celestials,
With a mind fixed on Him as the 'Means' and the 'End',
all at once.

Notes

(i) The Lord has to be looked upon, as both the 'Means' and the 'End'.

(ii) As the Internal Controller of the Individuals, He enables them to perform deeds and He confers the results, reward or punishment, as the case may be, because the deeds by themselves can't grant rewards or inflict punishments.

(iii) The Saint calls upon the people to shed their ill-conceived notions, born of conceit, which preclude them from coming under the emotional sway of the Lord's auspicious traits and the stupid sense of shame that they shall not exhibit in public their emotional upsurge and join the ranks of the illustrious devotees moving along, singing the Lord's glory and dancing in ecstasy.

tīrnta aṭiyavar-tammait tiruttip paṇikoḷḷa valla
ārnta pukaḻ accutaṉai, amarar-pirāṉai, emmāṉai,
vāynta vaḷa vayal cūḻ taṉ vaḷaṅ kurukūrc caṭakōpaṉ
nērnta ōr āyirattu ip pattu aruviṉai niṟu ceyyumē.
(III-5-11)

Translation

These songs ten, out of the thousand composed
By caṭakōpaṉ of fertile kurukūr, adoring Accutaṉ, the Lord
Of glory great, Chief of Celestials, Protector steadfast,
Who redeems those that unto Him stick fast,
As sole refuge and enlists them in His service eternal,
Will to ashes reduce all sins, however cruel.

Note

Failure to go into raptures, in contemplation of the Lord's auspicious traits and wondrous deeds, sing and dance,

literally dissolved in Him, would, no doubt, fall under the category of 'irredeemable' sins. These ten songs will, however, destroy even this type of sin and keep the chanters beyond its mischief.

Third Centum—Sixth Decad (III-6)
(Ceyya tāmaraik kaṇṇaṉ āy)

Preamble

In the preceding decad, the Āḻvār extolled the devotees thrown into a state of ecstasy, enraptured by the contemplation of the Lord's wondrous deeds and auspicious traits, moving about, all the time singing and dancing. In the same breath he spoke disparagingly of those who do not exhibit this kind of behaviour but remain callously indifferent, unmoved by and impervious to the glory of the Lord. But then, the Āḻvār, known for his deep compassion and love for the fellow-beings, wished to bring round even those in the latter category and impress, in their mind, the Lord's extraordinary trait of tender solicitude and easy accessibility. No doubt, the Āḻvār had already expatiated on this in I-3, but that was in terms of the Lord's incarnations (Vibhava aspect). And now, in this decad, the Āḻvār expounds the Lord's 'Saulabhya' easy accessibility in His Iconic Form which is not only the most easily accessible but also the very embodiment of every known and conceivable good quality in a perfect measure, a complete enumeration whereof would be beyond the capacity of the omniscient Lord Himself. Verily, the Lord's Arcā (Iconic) manifestation is the very acme, the farthest limit of His wonderful trait of 'Saulabhya'. Nampiḷḷai likens the Āḻvār's great gesture to that of Sītā, the captive in Laṅkā, who tendered wholesome advice to the lustful Rāvaṇa who desired to have promiscuous relation with the Divine Mother, mistaking her for a mere woman. Even as the Āḻvār made no secret of his vexation, in the last decad, of callous indifference and aloofness of men devoid of God-love, Sītā too got vexed with Rāvaṇa's amorous advances and the dearth of wholesome counsellors in the land, who could bring round this fiend of a fellow, terribly love-smitten. But, being grace personified, she herself counselled him to befriend Rāma and avoid a gruesome death.

The ninth song is the crucial one high-lighting the theme of this decad.

ceyya tāmaraik kaṇṇaṉ āy, ulaku ēḻum uṇṭa avaṉ kaṇṭīr!
vaiyam, vāṉam, maṉicar, teyvam, maṟṟum, maṟṟum, maṟṟum,
muṟṟum āy,
ceyya cūḻ cuṭar ñāṉam āy, veḷippaṭṭu, ivai paṭaittāṉ; piṉṉum,
moy koḷ cōtiyōṭu āyiṉāṉ-oru mūvar ākiya mūrttiyē.
(III-6-1)

Translation

Know ye, 'tis the red lotus-eyed Lord, Who did once contain
In His stomach, the worlds seven
And created this Earth, the upper regions, the humans,
Devas, beasts, plants and all else thro' His knowledge radiant;
He has His abode in the heaven resplendent
And carries out (the triple functions), standing as the Trinity.

Notes

(i) The opening stanza deals with the Lord's 'Paratva', the transcendental glory, although this decad is intended to spotlight the Lord's 'Saulabhya', or easy accessibility. Indeed, the Lord's 'Paratva' serves as a foil against which His astounding simplicity becomes even more pronounced and amazing and hence the Āḻvār begins with this complementary role of the Lord.

(ii) The red lotus-eyes proclaim the Lord's supremacy. *c.f.* tasya yathā kapyāsam puṇḍarīkam evam akṣiṇī, (Cāndogyopaniṣad). The Lord's eyes, highlight His Supremacy, as far as His form is concerned; likewise among His many attributes, 'pralayāpatsakhatva' or sustenance of the worlds with their variegated contents inside His stomach during the 'pralaya' (deluge), brings into focus His Supremacy over all the rest, the 'Container' vis-a-vis the 'Contained'.

(iii) Of the triple functions of creation, sustentation and dissolution, the middle one is attended to by the Lord Himself, standing as Viṣṇu, while the other two functions are carried out by Him through Brahmā and Śiva

respectively, as their Internal Controller. Whereas Brahmā and Śiva were produced by the Lord, Viṣṇu, standing in between, as a member of the Trinity, is the Lord Himself Who has none above, to create Him. In the cycle of cause and effect, if we go back from effect to cause of all things and beings, we will ultimately be left with the Lord who is His own cause, the Causeless Cause.

mūvar ākiya mūrttiyai, mutal mūvarkkum mutalvaṉ-taṉṉai,
cāvam uḷḷaṉa nīkkuvāṉai, taṭaṅ kaṭal kiṭantāṉ-taṉṉai,
tēva tēvaṉai, teṉ ilaṅkai eri eḻac ceṟṟa villiyai,
pāva nācaṉai, paṅkayat taṭaṅ kaṇṇaṉaip paravumiṉō.
(III-6-2)

Translation

Sing the glory of the immaculate Lord,
With large lotus-eyes, who set Laṅkā ablaze and destroyed
The enemies with His bow valiant, Chief of Celestials,
Destroyer of sins, who the Devas' distress dispels.
Foremost among the first three, He does the Trinity compose
And on the broad milky ocean repose.

Notes

(i) On being told about the Lord's transcendent glory, as in the preceding song, the Āḻvār was questioned by his listeners as to how they could at all propitiate such an exalted overlord. The Āḻvār, however, puts them at ease by pointing out in this song, the Lord's simplicity in His incarnate Form as Rāma.

(ii) "*First and foremost, Who the Trinity composes*": Please see note (iii), in the preceding song. Lord Viṣṇu's supremacy over Brahmā and Śiva is further pointed out here, in that He dispels their distress and among those thus relieved could be added Indra and other Devas. In order to eliminate the possible confusion by including Viṣṇu as a member of the Trinity and making others look upon Him, mistakenly of course, as on a par with the other two, namely, Brahmā and Śiva, the trinity could be taken, within the meaning

of this song, to comprise Brahmā, Śiva and Indra. Even otherwise, it may be pointed out that unlike the other two, namely, Brahmā and Śiva, Viṣṇu, standing in between, is His own cause (the Causeless Cause) as well as the Cause of the other two.

(iii) "*Set fire to Laṅkā*: Rāma's peerless bow played a lot of havoc and set fire to Rāvaṇa's Laṅkā which 'Agni', the fire-God, as one of the several elemental forces, Rāvaṇa had kept under strict control, dared not enter before.

(iv) "*Destroyer of sins*": As Sage Agastya put it, the mere sight of Rāma, the immaculate Lord, with bow in hand, will destroy all our sins.

paravi vāṉavar ētta niṉṟa paramaṉai, parañcōtiyai,
kuravai kōtta kuḻakaṉai, maṇi vaṇṇaṉai, kuṭak kūttaṉai,
aravam ēṟi, alai kaṭal amarum tuyilkoṇṭa aṇṇalai,
iravum naṉ pakalum viṭātu, eṉṟum ēttutal maṉam vaimmiṉō.
(III-6-3)

Translation

Day and night, without break, sing the glory of the supreme Lord,
Set your mind on Him, by Devas profusely lauded,
Who did (with Gopīs) tastefully dance, hand in hand,
Of superlative splendour, the Pot-dancer of the complexion
Of blue gem, reposing on His serpent-bed, in the surging ocean.

Notes

(i) And now, the Āḻvār introduces his audience to the Lord's Avatāra as Kṛṣṇa, of unsurpassed simplicity and calls upon the folks to set their minds firmly on Him who cannot but be loved because of His loving condescension, tender solicitude, unique charm, adorability and a host of other auspicious attributes.

Tradition has it that Mother Earth bitterly complained to Brahmā about the atrocious burden she had to carry, with demoniac forces like Kamsa and Śiśupāla

let loose on Earth. Brahmā and other Devas then made a bee-line to the Lord who was reclining on His serpent-bed in the milky ocean and petitioned to Him. Thereupon, the Lord came down as Kṛṣṇa and His task duly done, He went back to the Milky-ocean and rested on Ādiśeṣa, as before.

(ii) *The dance with the Gopīs*: It was a classical autumn night in the bright fortnight, the unique night of unparalleled excellence when the marvel of a dance, the immortal 'Rāsa Krīḍa', took place. 'Śrī Kṛṣṇa played on His inimitable flute, sending out sweet strains of music in all directions with their irresistible appeal to the young damsels of the pastoral village. They all left their homes, defying obstruction from the elders and converged towards the magic flautist. And then ensued the marvel of marvels, the wonderful wonder of wonders, the circular dance in which the ubiquitous Kṛṣṇa made Himself so very pliable as to be seen in between one Gopī and another, multiplying Himself in this fashion. Oh, how astounding that the Overlord of the Celestials in heaven should come down to Earth and mingle so freely with the shepherd-folks and be quite at home with them! And to those who missed witnessing this grand spectacle, He would exhibit His physical charm right at the cross-roads as the skilful Pot-dancer.

vaimmiṉ num maṉattu eṉṟu yāṉ uraikkiṉṟa māyavaṉ cīrmaiyai
emmaṉōrkaḷ uraippatu eṉ? atu niṟka, nāḷtoṟum vāṉavar–
tammai āḷumavaṉum, nāṉmukaṉum, caṭaimuṭi-aṇṇalum
cemmaiyāl avaṉ pāta paṅkayam cintittu ēttit tirivarē.

(III–6–4)

Translation

Let alone my telling you about the wondrous Lord,
Calling upon you to set on Him your mind,
His glory and goodness are such that Indra, the Devas' overlord,
Nāṉmukaṉ (Brahmā) and Śiva of matted locks reverently contemplate
And are in the worship of His lotus feet for ever engaged.

Note

The Āḻvār tells his listeners: "Apart from people of my ilk dinning into your ears the Lord's easy accessibility and his many other auspicious traits, I want you to note how Indra, Brahmā and Śiva, worshipped by many as their God, themselves keep meditating all the time on Lord Viṣṇu's glory and goodness and worship His lotus feet. If the supreme Lord has made Himself so pliable even to the self-seekers for facility of their worship, what more need I tell you about His easy accessibility and easy worshippability by those whose minds are rivetted on Him, as an end in itself?"

tiriyum kāṟṟōṭu akal vicumpu, tiṇinta maṇ, kiṭanta kaṭal,
eriyum tīyōṭu iru cuṭar, teyvam, maṟṟum maṟṟum muṟṟum āy–
kariya mēṉiyaṉ, ceyya tāmaraik kaṇṇaṉ, kaṇṇaṉ, viṇṇōr iṟai,
curiyum pal karuṅ kuñci eṅkaḷ cuṭar muṭi aṇṇal tōṟṟamē.

(III–6–5)

Translation

The red lotus-eyed Kaṇṇaṉ of bluish hue, Chief of Celestials,
With dark curly locks, wearing the radiant crown,
Is manifest in the elements five, Sun and Moon,
Devas, humans and other species, one and all.

Note

The Āḻvār speaks here of both the universal (lines 3 and 4) and the exclusive Individual (lines 1 and 2) Forms of the Lord, as visualised by him. (Āṟāyirappaṭi).

tōṟṟam, kēṭu avai illavaṉ; uṭaiyāṉ; avaṉ oru mūrttiyāy,
ciṟṟattōṭu aruḷ peṟṟavaṉ aṭik kīḻp puka niṉṟa ceṅkaṇmāl;
nāṟṟam, tōṟṟam, cuvai, oli, uṟal āki niṉṟa em vāṉavar
ēṟṟaiyē aṉṟi maṟṟoruvarai yāṉ ilēṉ, eḻumaikkumē. (III–6–6)

Translation

At no time shall I seek refuge in any one,
Other than my red lotus-eyed Lord, full of love
For his devotees Who is unto me all the senses five,
The subtle matter of smell, colour, taste, touch and sound;

Chief of Celestials, free from birth and death, He owns
us all mortals; the peerless one (Naraciṅka) full of fury He was
And yet stood at His feet (Prahlāda) the recipient of His
grace.

Notes

(i) The Āḻvār avers that He belongs to none but Naraciṅka, the incarnate Form of the Lord, who exhibited boundless love for Prahlāda. To the question put to Śrī Rāmānuja, how the little lad, Prahlāda, could at all approach the ferocious Naraciṅka, when He was pouring His unmitigated wrath on Hiraṇya, the great Ācārya replied in a homely way that even while the lion attacks the elephant, the lion cub could jolly well suck milk from the mother's teats.

(ii) The eyes of the Lord could be red, both ways, that is, due to the wrath of Naraciṅka for Hiraṇya or due to His tender love for Prahlāda.

(iii) The five senses, namely, smell, sight, taste, sound and touch, which are differently experienced by the worldlings with reference to the external objects of the visible world, are all experienced in the Lord Himself by the Āḻvār, like unto the 'Nitya Sūris' (ever-free angels) in Heaven. These senses have a meaning for them only in relation to God-enjoyment.

eḻumaikkum eṉatu āvikku iṉ amutattiṉai, eṉatu ār uyir
keḻumiya katirc cōtiyai, maṇi vaṇṇaṉai, kuṭak kūttaṉai,
viḻumiya amarar muṉivar viḻuṅkum kaṉṉal-kaṉiyiṉai,
toḻumiṉ, tūya maṉattar āy: iṟaiyum nillā tuyaraṅkaḷē.
(III-6-7)

Translation

If, with a mind clean, you worship the Lord,
The candy fruit, by Sages and Devas devoured,
My soul's eternal nectar, of sapphire hue, the beaconlight in
my dear soul, absorbed,
The pot-dancer, You will from miseries be completely absolved.

Notes

(i) The Āḻvār exhorts his listeners to shake off their fear of an unapproachable, distant Lord, by emphasising His easy-accessibility and enormous love for His devotees. There was indeed a time, when he too was afraid of mingling with the Lord, lest he should defile Him, but now, freed from such a complex, he is in grand communion with the Lord and his tempo goes up all the time beaming with God-love.

(ii) The cleanliness of mind, referred to here, is freedom from doubt and despair, fear and fright, in the matter of worshipping the highly adorable Lord of loving condescension, which tend to lead one astray into the domain of sensual pleasures. Shorn of all such doubts and fears, the Āḻvār exhorts people to attach themselves solely to the Lord seeking no personal gains, and thus get absolved of all their sins.

tuyaramē taru tuṉpa iṉpa viṉaikaḷ āy, avai allaṉ āy,
uyara niṉṟatu ōr cōti āy, ulaku ēḻum uṇṭu umiḻntāṉ-taṉṉai,
ayara vāṅkum namaṉ tamarkku arunañciṉai, accutaṉ-taṉṉai,
tayarataṟku makaṉ-taṉṉai aṉṟi maṟṟu ilēṉ tañcamākavē.
(III-6-8)

Translation

I seek refuge in none but Tayarataṉ's Son,
Accutaṉ (the Protector steadfast), the deadly poison
Unto Namaṉ's cruel hordes, Who the worlds seven
Did once sustain and later spat them out
The heavenly light of splendour unique, dealing out,
Rewards and punishments for acts, good and bad
And yet by them, by no means affected.

Notes

(i) The Āḻvār declares his firm faith in Śrī Rāma (who incarnated as King Daśaratha's son) as his sole Refuge, in order to infuse in others a similar interest in the Lord.

(ii) As the upaniṣads put it, the so-called rewards for good acts also operate as impediments for entry into Heaven and are thus no better then punishments undergone for bad acts. The best thing, therefore, is to look upon the Lord as the sole Refuge, the 'Means' and the 'End' rolled into one, instead of aspiring for the fruits of one's actions.

(iii) *Daśaratha's son*: The Lord was born as Rāma, Son of King Daśaratha, totally subservient to the father, subject to any kind of treatment at the latter's will. The king would now say that he is gifting away the kingdom to Rāma and a little hence ask him to go into exile!

(iv) Speaking about taking refuge at the feet of the Lord, there are some passages in the Iṭu commentary, which are very interesting and instructive. The Image of Kṛṣṇa, the child, fond of eating butter, was worshipped by Śrī Rāmānuja, as the household God. One day, a disciple handed over to the Preceptor an Image of Śrī Rāma. Thereupon the Ācārya exclaimed: 'Oh, He who did not impose the condition of seeking Him as sole Refuge, has come". What was conveyed here by the great Preceptor was that Srī Rāma was satisfied if one sought asylum in Him but once, saying that he belonged to Him. On the other hand, Śrī Kṛṣṇa laid down, "Resort to me as your sole Refuge", as a spiritual rule, so to say. The statement that no more than affectionate yielding or non-opposition when the Lord's grace is offered is needed as the price for salvation, only signifies the infinite mercy and readiness to reclaim, on the part of the Lord, as the great Redeemer of the straying Subjects. If, however, one started enumerating the positive qualifications on the part of the Individual to deserve the Lord's grace, one has to begin with 'implicit trust in, and abandonment to God' (mahāviśvāsa), which again is very difficult of attainment indeed. If a traveller on a long sea-voyage could trust himself to a mere floating wood (ship) and supplement it with a storage of food and water for six months, all inanimate things, should we not have some such confidence at least in God as our Means of salvation, that is, crossing the much bigger ocean of Samsāra?

tañcam ākiya tantai tāyoṭu tāṉum āy, avai allaṉ āy,
eñcal il amarar kulamutal, mūvar tammuḷḷum ātiyai,
añci nīr ulakattuḷḷīrkaḷ! avaṉ ivaṉ eṉṟu kūḻēṉmiṉ;
neñciṉāl niṉaippāṉ evaṉ, avaṉ ākum nīḷ kaṭal vaṇṇaṉē.
(III–6–9)

Translation

Ye, men of the world, be not scared (of the supremacy)
Of our Lord, Chief of the Celestials, foremost of the three,
He is the Father benign, Mother and much more, you see,
Be not agitated whether He is other than the one in Image Form
(You behold here); be sure, the Lord of oceanic hue does assume
Whatever form you in your mind lovingly conceive of
Him.

Notes

(i) The worldlings, addressed by the Āḻvār, expressed their difficulty in worshipping the Lord currently, either in His transcendent form or in His incarnate forms as Rāma or Kṛṣṇa. The Āḻvār puts them at ease by telling them now that the Lord is easily worshippable in any form they like, without any loss or diminution of His divine prowess and that they can, therefore, worship Him easily in His 'Arcā' (image) Form. This song is thus the key note of this decad and all the preceding eight songs have only served as a preamble.

(ii) As we see among our earthly relations, the mother is different from the father. The Lord is, however, our eternal Father as well as Mother and has an individuality of His own, being very different from the earthly parents. The earthly parents have their own limitations and are not also always dependable, their own interests super-

seding those of the progeny. Instances of parents giving up their young ones under certain circumstances are not wanting. Further, it is our Karma that binds us to our earthly parents and this artificial link gets automatically severed with the severance of our own bonds of Karma, our relationship with the Lord is, however, eternal, being inalienable.

Further, there is scarcely a relationship which the Lord cannot assume, in regard to His subjects, being All-in-one, Father, Mother and all other conceivable relations put together.

kaṭal vaṇṇaṉ kaṇṇaṉ viṇṇavar karumāṇikkam eṉātu ār uyir,
paṭa araviṉ aṇaikkiṭanta parañ cuṭar, paṇṭu nūṟṟuvar
aṭa varum paṭai maṅka aivarkaṭku āki vem camattu aṉṟu tēr
kaṭaviya perumāṉ kaṉai kaḻal kāṇpatu eṉṟukol, kaṇkaḷē!

(III-6-10)

Translation

When shall I behold the victorious feet of my Lord,
'Kaṇṇaṉ' of oceanic hue, by those in Heaven adored,
Like unto a blue gem, the supreme light, my Soul dear,
Reclining on hooded serpent, unto the five (Pāṇḍavas) dear,
Who drove Arjuna's chariot and did the armies annihilate,
Slaying the hundred (Kauravas) in the war of Mahābhārata?

Note

Having expounded the Lord's easy-accessibility (Saulabhya) in all His manifestations, right up to the 'Arcā' (Iconic Form) the Āḻvār is now deeply absorbed in the Lord's incarnate form as Kṛṣṇa, because it was in this Avatāra that he caught the first glimpses of the Lord's amazing simplicity and went into a trance state, lasting several months. Picturing in his mind Kṛṣṇa, the Charioteer holding the whip and the reins, with the hair on his uncrowned bare head covered by the dust from the battlefield and a pair of legs dangling from the chariot, the Āḻvār hears (fanciful, of course) the tingling sound of the ornaments worn on those

legs and this is enough to stir up in him a strong desire to behold the Lord's exquisite Form.

kaṇkaḷ kāṇṭaṟku ariyaṉ āy, karuttukku naṉṟum eḷiyaṉ āy,
maṇ koḷ ñālattu uyirkku ellām aruḷ ceyyum vāṉavar īcaṉai
paṇ koḷ cōlai vaḻuti nāṭaṉ kurukaikkōṉ caṭakōpaṉ col
paṇ koḷ āyirattu īp pattāl pattar ākakkūṭum payilumiṉē.

(III-6-11)

Translation

Learn these songs ten out of the thousand tunefully composed
By Caṭakōpaṉ of Vaḻutināṭu, the doyen of fertile Kurukūr,
In adoration of the Supreme Lord, difficult to behold
But easy to meditate, Who sheds His grace galore
(Making Himself visible to one and all in this world,
In His Image Form); you will also become devotees pure.

Notes

(i) *Difficult to behold but easy to meditate*: The Āḻvār does not enjoy the physical presence of the Lord and, therefore, regretfully observes that the Lord is difficult to behold. Out of sight but not out of mind, as his forward mind keeps meditating on Him. As a matter of fact, throughout this work, the Āḻvār's union with the Lord only connotes his mental comprehension of the Lord's vision, almost on a par with His physical presence and the Āḻvār's separation from the Lord arises when he longs for the external perception of the Lord as well and his intuitive inner vision gets cut out in the bargain.

(ii) Chanting this decad, which highlights the Lord's amazingly easy-accessibility in His manifestation, will, by itself, engender God-love. Even as people will start a 'Treasure hunt' digging the ground deep, at the place where the sign-board "Here lies a treasure, buried" is put up, the Āḻvār expects people, in quest of God-love to chant this decad.

Third Centum—Seventh Decad (III-7)
Payilum Cuṭar oḷi

Preamble

Despite his earlier disappointments, it was his extraordinary fellow-feeling that egged the Āḷvār on, to address the worldlings once more, as in the last decad, pretty sure of bringing them round. Even the amazing simplicity of the Lord in His 'Arcā' manifestation, the sure plank, according to the Āḷvār, for weaning them, made no visible impact on the unfortunate fellows wallowing in the sty of worldly life, much to the chagrin of the Āḷvār. The Āḷvār, however, drowns his disappointment, in this decad in the blissful contemplation of service unto the Lord's devotees, the logical conculsion of service unto the Lord, in keeping with the essential nature of the Individual soul.

In 'Periya Tirumoḷi' (VIII-10-3), Tirumaṅkai Āḷvār has declared that, as a result of learning the eight-lettered 'Tirumantra', he became a vassal of the devotees of the Lord, enshrined in Tirukkaṇṇapuram. Service unto the Lord's devotees, as well, is implied in the middle part of 'Tirumantra', viz, 'namaḥ'. It is held by some that service unto the Lord's devotees is implicit in letter *A* of 'Praṇava' (Aum), with its discarded dative case-ending, which brings into focus the soul's dependence on the Lord; others say that the middle letter *U* of 'Praṇava' emphasises the exclusive dependence of the soul on the Lord and that the farthest point upto which dependence on the Lord could go, by virtue of His unbounded love for His devotees, would be the individual soul's utter devotion to those devotees as well. This is readily borne out by our common experience in the world of human affairs also. It, however, matters not whether this particular meaning goes with the word 'namaḥ' or letter 'A' or letter 'U' of the Praṇava (AUM). All the same, our great preceptors have thought it fit to link this concept with the word 'namaḥ' which helps to discard the rags of 'I-ness' and 'My-ness', enveloping and disfiguring the individual soul.

Śatrugna provided the shining example of unflinching service marked by extraordinary devotion to Bharata, a great devotee of Śri Rāma. Soon after the marriage of the four Princes, in Mithilā, Bharata had an invitation from his uncle, king Yudājit

of Kekaya (perhaps, modern Greece) to go with him to that country. Bharata set out on the said journey, on an auspicious day, appropriate to his birth star. The inseparable Śatrugna also accompanied Bharata, out of his dutiful love for the latter, although the former had no invitation, as such, from King Yudājit nor did the day of the commencement of the journey suit his (Śatrugna's) birth star. According to Śatrugna whose devotion to Bharata was of such a high order, there was hardly any need for all these, as he considered himself no more than a part and parcel of Bharata and not as a separate entity.

payilum cuṭar oḷi mūrttiyai, paṅkayak kaṇṇaṉai,
payila iṉiya nam pāṟkaṭal-cērnta paramaṉai,
payilum tiru uṭaiyār evarēlum, avar kaṇṭīr
payilum piṟappiṭaitōṟu emmai āḷum paramarē. (III-7-1)

Translation

They that are with eternal wealth of God -love endowed
Whatever be their descent, meditating on our Lord Supreme
Resting on the milk-ocean, the lotus-eyed, of a form
Of solid splendour and mounting sweetness, shall hold
Me as their vassal, in all the births to come.

Notes

(i) The Āḷvār says that all those who are steeped in the enjoyment of the Supreme Lord's auspicious traits and enthralling form, are his masters, irrespective of their parentage. These devotees have now been accorded by the Āḷvār the position of eminence attributed earlier to the Supreme Lord alone.

(ii) *The lotus-eyed*: This special feature proclaims the Lord's transcendent glory (paratva). It is indeed a form of supernal splendour that the Lord assumes, during His avatāras, so as to enthral His subjects; even if such an exquisite form fails to attract them, His lotus-eyes will do the job—the folks cannot but be entrapped by His bewitching eyes.

(iii) *Mounting sweetness*: Unlike the ephemeral pleasures of the world, which are alluring from a distance but

prove disappointing at close quarters, the Lord, with His enchanting looks and enthralling form and a disposition of mounting sweetness, is an inexhaustible fountain of bliss.

(iv) *Eternal wealth of God-Love*: Those who employ the Lord as the 'Means' for achieving their personal ends, would drift from Him, once their ends are achieved. On the other hand, those that seek Him for His own sake, as their 'Be-all' and 'End-All', will stick unto Him for ever and there is no risk whatsoever of their getting parted from Him. Service unto the Lord, as an end in itself, is the eternal wealth referred to there. Take the case of Lakṣmaṇa who, at his volition, accompanied Śrī Rāma into exile. What wealth did the youngster carry with him? With but a spade and basket in hand, the insignia of his incessant toil in his unremitting service unto the Divine Couple, he is glorified as '*Lakṣmaṇo Lakṣmī sampannaḥ*'. Again, literally hounded out by Rāvaṇa, Vibhīṣaṇa, still anchored in mid-air, sought asylum in Rāma's camp. Vibhīṣaṇa's admission into Rāma's camp was hotly debated and, in this unenviable position, when Vibhīṣaṇa was neither here nor there, he was referred to, as '*antarkṣagatas śrīmān*'. What was the wealth in him then to be called 'Śrīmān' (the wealthy)? It was his robust conviction that he shall not get back to the evil-minded Rākṣasas, even if he were to be denied admission in Rāma's camp! And then, Gajendra, the elephant, in dire distress, was referred to as '*Satu nāgavaraś Śrīmān*', the wealth, in this case, being the elephant's singleminded devotion to the Lord, utterly unmindful of his own grim struggle with the crocodile. The elephant's one and only objective was to offer the lotus flower in his trunk to the Lord, while it was still fresh. It is such singleminded devotion to the Lord that is real wealth, everlasting.

Deeply grieved over his separation from Śrī Rāma, during the long years of the latter's exile, Bharata would say that his grief would vanish only when Rāma wore

the regal crown (as Śeṣi—Master) and he wore, the *crown of service unto Him* (as Śeṣa—the servant).

'*Whatever be their descent*': Here, it may be added, whatever be the extent of their learning, manner of occupation etc.

'*In the births to come*: Here, the Āḻvār declares that he is the vassal of the Lord's devotees, rather than of the Lord. The Āḻvār who had earlier blamed the Lord for taking him through a gruesome succesion of births, would now willingly court any number of future births out of sheer love of serving the Lord's devotees in all those births.

āḻum paramaṉai, kaṇṇaṉai, āḻip piräṉ-taṉṉai,
tōḷum ōr nāṉku, uṭait tū maṇi vaṇṇaṉ emmāṉ-taṉṉai,
tāḻum taṭak kaiyum kūppip paṇiyum avar kaṇṭīr
nāḷum piṟappiṭaitōṟu emmai āḷuṭai nātarē. (III-7-2)

Translation

They are the Masters that enslave me daily and life after life,
Who do with joined palms and legs, prostrate
Unto Kaṇṇaṉ, the Lord Supreme, the Benefactor great,
Holding the discus, of the hue of blue gem immaculate,
With peerless shoulders four, the reigning Chief.

Notes

(i) The Āḻvār affirms that those that are swayed by the Lord's exquisite charm, in all its details, are his perennial masters.

(ii) *Reigning Chief*: If the Lord's devotees are the Āḻvār's masters, how could the Lord be called the reigning Chief? This *prima facie* contradiction is resolved by holding that the Lord's reign over His subjects is directed towards reclaiming them and enlisting them in the service of His devotees. Right in the opening line of the first of his ten scintillating stanzas, Tiruppāṇ Āḻvār depicts this special feature of the Lord.

(iii) *Lord Kaṇṇaṉ*: By His devoted service unto His elder brother Balarāma, a reincarnation of Ādiśeṣa, Śrī Kṛṣṇa has demonstrated the importance of service unto devotees.

(iv) *The Shoulders four*: The Lord doles out the four 'Puruṣārtas', the ultimate values, as elected by the votaries, with His four arms, one for each. Once, when Śrī Parāśara Bhaṭṭar happened to be in Tirukkōṭṭiyūr, he was asked by Anantāḻvāṉ whether the Lord is seen in His Celestium (Heaven-Parama pada) with two arms or four arms. Bhaṭṭārya replied that the 'Ekāyanas' (Madhvās) hold that the Lord has only two arms while others say four. In the temple at Śrīraṅgam, the stationary image of Lord Raṅganātha, reclining on the Serpent-bed, in the Sanctum Sanctorum (Known as Periya Perumāḷ) is seen by us, with the naked eye, as having only two arms while those, with spiritual vision, see four arms and even more. Tirupppāṇāḻvār has seen Lord Raṅganātha with four arms, as set forth in his hymns (Amalaṉātipirāṉ-7). Maṇḍodari, wife of Rāvaṇa, saw the ultra-mundane form in Śrī Rāma, standing beside her fallen husband and described the former as the one beyond matter, the Sustainer, wielding the Conch, Discus and Mace. Śrī Rāma was generally seen only with two arms; Hanumān, however, alluded to many arms (*bhāhavaḥ*, Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa IV-3-14). Kṛṣṇa was seen by Vasudeva and Devakī, with four arms, right at birth, and He concealed the two extra arms, as desired by His revered father. And then, on the battlefield at Kurukṣetra, Arjuna prayed that he be allowed to see Kṛṣṇa back again with four arms instead of the thousands of arms he saw in His universal Form (Viśvarūpa) a little while ago (Bhagavad Gītā XI-46). In Rāmāyaṇa, Uttara Kāṇḍa 8-26, Sage Agastya addressed Śrī Rāma, as. "Thou art Nārāyaṇa, the ancient, the four-armed". Nevertheless, one need not make a fetish of this, as four-handedness need not necessarily be a special sign of Divinity to wrest

allegiance from mankind. (It is learnt that a four-handed human form is kept embalmed in Fyzabad museum near Ayodhyā. Would it become worthy of worship? No, not at all.)

(v) *Prostrate with joined legs and palms*

Joined legs indicate immobility, '*ananyagatitva*', or non-dependence on others—'nowhere else to go', in plain language.

'*Joined palms*' devote '*Ākiñcanya*' or absence of any merit in the supplicant, attracting the Lord's grace; in other words, it is only the Lord's '*nirhetuka kṛpā*', spontaneous or gratuitous grace that can deliver the goods.

nātaṉai, ñālamum vāṉamum ēttum naṟum tuḷāyp
pōtaṉai, poṉ neṭum cakkarattu entai pirāṉ-taṉṉai,
pātam paṇiya vallāraip paṇiyumavar kaṇṭīr
ōtum piṟappitaitōṟu emmai āḷuṭaiyārkaḷē. (III-7-3)

Translation

Birth after birth, they my masters shall be,
Who prostrate at the feet of my Liege-Lord,
Holding the golden Discus grand and wearing a garland of tuḷaci
Of fragrance sweet, by those in Heaven and Earth adored.

Notes

(i) The Āḻvār declares that those God-lovers, who are lost in enjoyment of the Lord's sinewy shoulders and the lovely tuḷaci garland adorning them, are his perpetual masters.

As a matter of fact, this fascinating combination of shoulder and garland attracts the denizens of Heaven and Earth alike. Even those who are out to denigrate God-head, get enthralled by the charming tuḷac i garland on the Divine person. Where even the tuḷac i garland fails to work, the effulgent Discus, held attractively by the Lord, has an irresistible appeal.

(ii) The following anecdote will show how difficult it is for us to bring ourselves to adore men who, for all outward appearances, are just like other men, the common run, eating and sleeping. To discover saintliness lying hidden in the Saints, calls for more than ordinary ken of perception in the on-looker.

Śrī Piḷḷai Āttāṉ, occupant of a spiritual gadi, in apostolic succession, sought from the great Nañcīyar, instructions in 'Dramiḍopaniṣad' (Tiruvāymoḻi). His Holiness, however, politely suggested that Śrī Āttāṉ could as well go to Nampiḷḷai (Nañcīyar's disciple) and enjoy a sumptuous repast at his hands. Śrī Āttāṉ, however, demurred, on the ground that he may have to prostrate unto Nampiḷḷai in that case. Nañcīyar put Śrī Āttāṉ at ease, by sending for Nampiḷḷai and ordering him to give Śrī Āttāṉ a course of instructions without subjecting the latter to ceremonious formalities. And so, the instructions went on, but when the present decad stressing the importance of veneration of Godly men even more than God, came up, Śrī Āttāṉ turned penitent and begged of Nampiḷḷai that he (Āttāṉ) be treated thenceforward as a humble disciple and permitted to make due obeisance to the learned instructor. But Nampiḷḷai declined to act otherwise than as commanded earlier by his Master (Nañcīyar) and would not, therefore, be a party to this change-over on the part of Śrī Āttāṉ. The remorseful Āttāṉ sought the intervention of Nañcīyar and submitted that he (Āttāṉ) be treated thenceforward as a humble disciple, now that he has come to know of the worthiness of Godly men, the living Saints.

There is yet another anecdote to illustrate that brotherhood among men is a virtue higher than even Fatherhood of God. Two favourite disciples of Nañcīyar, Vīrappiḷḷai and Pālikai vāḻippiḷḷai, once set out on a travel on friendly terms. But when some misunderstanding arose between them they gave up talking to each other. When Nañcīyar came to know of this, he admonished them, saying: "My Sons! it is difficult to comprehend one brother being offended against another. It only shows that wealth and lust, the cause of hate and anger, have not been eschewed yet or things of God have not been felt of great worth". This reprimand made them feel truly repentant and restored their former amity.

uṭai ārnta āṭaiyaṉ, kaṇṭikaiyaṉ, uṭai nāṇiṉaṉ,
puṭai ār poṉ-nūliṉaṉ, poṉ muṭiyaṉ, maṟṟum palkalaṉ
naṭaiyā uṭait tirunāraṇaṉ toṇṭar toṇṭar kaṇṭīr
iṭai ār piṟappiṭaitōṟu emakku em perumakkaḷē. (III-7-4)

Translation

In every birth, without exception, they are unto us
Far superior indeed, the vassals of the vassals
Of Tiru Nāraṇaṉ, of charm exquisite, smartly clad
And adorned by many a jewel, the waist band gold,
Necklace, Sacred thread, the crown delectable
And many more, unto Him befitting and natural.

Note

Here the Āḻvār avers that the vassals of the vassals of the Lord, lost in admiration of His natural beauty, imparting special lustre to the numerous jewels on His person, each one of which, from head to foot, steals the hearts of the beholders, are any day superior to him not only in this birth but in all future births also.

perumakkaḷ uḷḷavar-tam perumāṉai, amararkaṭku
arumai oḻiya aṉṟu ār amutu ūṭṭiya appaṉai,
perumai pitaṟṟa vallāraip pitaṟṟumavar kaṇṭīr
varumaiyum immaiyum nammai aḷikkum pirākkaḷē. (III-7-5)

Translation

They that do with ecstatic incoherence utter
The glory great of the Sire who once fed in full
The Devas with ambrosia, Chief of the exalted Celestials,
Are indeed our saviours grand, both here and hereafter.

Notes

(i) *Chief of the exalted Celestials*: The *Nityasūrīs* (ever free angels in heaven) stand on a high pedestal of their own and the Lord, as their Chief, is higher than the highest.

(ii) The Devas sought from the Lord the ambrosia in order to become deathless. No doubt, the Lord felt very much that the Devas should have been so short-sighted and under-evolved as to seek from Him a mere extract from the ocean instead of straightaway coveting Him, the insatiable Nectar, the inexhaustible fountain of bliss. And yet, it was some consolation for Him that they didn't seek this favour, inferior though, from any one else. How generous of Him indeed that He took all the trouble to churn the ocean and get them what they wanted! Those that are lost in admiration of the great souls who recognise and adore this act of grace on the part of the Lord, are deemed by the Āḻvār as his benefactors, the masters, who alone can salve him, here and hereafter in this land by keeping him aloof from the Ungodly and, in the yonder heaven, by putting him on to the eternal service of Lord Śrīman Nārāyaṇa.

aḻikkum paramaṉai, kaṇṇaṉai, āḻip pirāṉ-taṉṉai,
tuḻikkum naṟum kaṇṇit tū maṇi vaṇṇaṉ emmāṉ-taṉṉai,
oḻik koṇṭa cōtiyai uḷḷattuk koḷḷumavar kaṇṭīr
calippu iṉṟi āṇṭu, emmaic caṉma caṉmāntaram kāpparē.
(III-7-6)

Translation

They shall my saviours be and govern
In all my births, without break, that do enshrine
In their hearts, Kaṇṇaṉ, the donor superfine,
Of radiant form, like unto the blue gem immaculate,
Who does the discus wield and tuḻaci garland sport,
With fragrance full, shedding honey in plenty.

Notes

(i) *Donor superfine*: The Lord is not merely the Donor Supreme but also the Donor Superfine in that He gifts Himself away as He did during His Avatāra as Kṛṣṇa.

(ii) *The (beneficent) discus*: The Lord would not only give of Himself to His devotees but also give them His extraordinary weapons as He did in the case of King Ambarīṣa. The Lord's alert discus served as the King's bodyguard and went in hot pursuit of sage Durvāsa.

(iii) No doubt, the Āḻvār courted, in the opening song of this decad, future births, if he could thereby serve the Lord's devotees without break but now, the protection extended by them unto him, referred to in this song, would be by way of safeguarding him against the pitfalls leading to rebirth.

caṉma caṉmāntaram kāttu, aṭiyārkaḷaik koṇṭupōy,
taṉmai peṟuttit taṉ-tāḷiṇaikkīḻk koḷḷum appaṉai,
toṉmai pitaṟṟa vallāraip pitaṟṟumavar kaṇṭīr
naṉmai peṟuttu emmai nāḷ uyyakkoḷkiṉṟa namparē.
(III-7-7)

Translation

They are, you see, our saviours eternal, we can for our salvation
Safely depend, that laud in profusion those vociferous
In the praise of the Lord's grace spontaneous,
That cuts out His devotees' cycle of births and does in them induce
Knowledge true, so to enlist them in eternal service at His feet in heaven.

Note

The Āḻvār has been spot-lighting the Lord's magnanimity in the last two songs, and he continues to dwell on the Lord's generosity in this song also, by extolling those lost in admiration of this great trait of the Lord. It is the Lord's extreme generosity that cuts out an otherwise interminable cycle of births and rebirths through which one's ethical accounts, hopelessly unbalanced as they are,

have to be settled with the ever-increasing risk of losing merit faster than acquiring it.

nampaṉai, ñālam paṭaittavaṉai, tiru mārpaṉai,
umpar ulakiṉil yārkkum uṇarvu ariyāṉ-taṉṉai,
kumpi narakarkaḷ ēttuvarēlum, avar kaṇṭīr
em pal piṟappipiṭaitōṟu em toḻukulam tāṅkaḷē. (III-7-8)

Translation

Even if they be cruel sinners fit for dastardly hell,
They are the apostles, revered in my births, one and all,
That sing the glory of the Lord, our haven safe,
On whose chest 'Tiru' (Lakṣmī) does inseparably stay,
Who did the universe ordain but is beyond the comprehension
Of one and all, even those in the upper region.

Note

The Āḻvār avers that those adoring the blissful conjunction of the Lord and the Divine Mother, are his spiritual mentors for generations, although they might be cruel sinners either for generations, although they might be cruel sinners either fit to be condemned to the dastardly abyss, known as '*Kumbhīpākam*', or even those actually drudging there. This only shows the extreme lengths to which the Āḻvār is prepared to go in his adoration of the Lord's devotees, and it is, therefore, needless to subject it to closer scrutiny and raise doubts as to how the Āḻvār could see, from where he was, those people serving in the hell and the prospects of those suffering in hell contemplating the glory of the Lord and reciting His names and so on.

kulam tāṅku cātikaḷ nālilum kīḻ iḻintu, ettaṉai
nalam-tāṉ ilāta caṇṭāḷa caṇṭāḷarkaḷ ākilum,
valam tāṅku cakkarattu aṇṇal maṇivaṇṇaṟku āḷ eṉṟu uḷ-
kalantār aṭiyār-tam aṭiyār em aṭikaḷē. (III-7-9)

Translation

They are my masters who the vassals are of the vassals
Of those that, as His loving servitors, do mingle
With the Lord of sapphire hue, holding the discus bright,

In right hand, albeit they are born in a down-trodden Caste,
Worse than the Caṇṭāḷa with little or no repute.

Notes

(i) The servants of the servants of those devotees, enthralled by the bewitching beauty of the Lord holding the charming discus in hand, are said to be the Āḻvār's masters, even though the said devotees are otherwise terribly depraved, and worse than the 'Caṇṭāḷa', outside the Ken of the four prescribed, time-honoured castes. While devotion to the Lord's devotees is the Key-note of this song, there is an unfortunate tendency on the part of the superficial modern critics, with a degree of perversion, to go by the letter of the song rather than the underlying spirit. These unrelenting critics question the bonafides of those who reverently chant 'Tiruvāymoḻi' and yet do not put into practice the principles, the Āḻvār stood for and expounded in his works, e.g. this crucial song.

(ii) Stanzas, such as this one, would, however, appear to spot-light the greatness of such highly evolved spiritual personalities as Tirumaḻicai Āḻvār, Tiruppāṇāḻvār, Nampāṭuvāṉ, either born as outcastes or brought up by outcastes, who yet belong to a world of their own and a new denomination known as 'The clan of God's servants', which has nothing to do with the conventional caste-system and classification. Of course, devotion has to be appreciated and adored wherever it is discerned, irrespective of considerations of caste and things of that sort. This love and reference for devotees cannot, however, override the prescribed norms of conduct, appropriate to one's caste and station in life. This song should not, therefore, be misconstrued as conferring unbridled authority for hammering down and brushing aside the mandates of the Śāstras, as restated by Lord Kṛṣṇa in His 'Song Celestial'—(Bhagavad Gītā, XVI-24).

aṭi ārnta vaiyam uṇṭu, ālilai aṉṉavacamceyyum
paṭi yātum il kuḻavippaṭi entai pirāṉ-taṉakku
aṭiyār aṭiyār-tam aṭiyār aṭiyār-tamakku
aṭiyār aṭiyār-tam aṭiyār aṭiyōṅkaḷē. (III-7-10)

Translation

Vassals we are of the last in the chain
Of the vassals of the devotees of our Liege-Lord
Who as mere babe peerless did recline
On a fig-leaf, holding the seven worlds,
In His stomach, which earlier He did span.

Notes

(i) The Āḻvār affirms that he is the vassal unto those that stand last in the chain of the Lord's devotees, sure and steadfast, lost in admiration of His once spanning all the worlds in just three strides and then sustaining, in His stomach, all the worlds, during the period of deluge.

(ii) The worlds devoured by the Lord during the period of deluge are just those measured by Him earlier and thus come up to His feet only, that is, they are no more than the size of His feet.

(iii) A mere babe lying on a fig-leaf, floating on the huge expanse of water, containing within its stomach all the world, is indeed a wonderful achievement, beyond imagination, which the Supreme Lord is capable of, the unique blending of the incompatibles. Attracting the Āḻvār by this means, He becomes his Liege-Lord and, in the process, the Āḻvār wants to be at the bottom-most rung of His devotees, even as He is the top-most, with none equal to or above Him. (Mukunda mālā, śloka 27).

(iv) Here is an important observation of Nampiḷḷai, which has to be studied in continuation of the notes below stanza 9 of this decad.

"Even if we are not able to translate into practice this lofty sentiment of the Āḻvār for obvious reasons, it will suffice if we delightfully contemplate on it and are thus aware that the Āḻvār thought on these lines".

aṭi aṅku nūṟṟuvar vīya, aṉṟu aivarkku aruḷceyta
neṭiyōṉait teṉ kurukūrc caṭakōpaṉ kuṟṟēvalkaḷ
aṭi ārnta āyirattuḷ ivai pattu avaṉ toṇṭarmēl
muṭivu ārak kaṟkiṟkil caṉmam ceyyāmai muṭiyumē. (III-7-11)

Translation

Those that learn, in right earnest, these songs ten,
Which expound the glory great of the Godly men,
Out of the chaste and elegant thousand of Caṭakōpaṉ
Of Teṉkurukūr, composed in a spirit of dedication
Unto the Lord who on the five (Pāṇḍavas) shed His grace
And put an end to the hundred (cousins) viciously prosperous,
Will have their cycle of births brought to a close.

Notes

(i) This end-stanza reveals the benefit accruing to those learning this decad without skipping over any stanza. They will not have to be reborn and caught up in the unenviable meshes of worldly life militating against service unto the Lord's devotees.

(ii) The Kauravas' advancement was at the expense of their five cousins, the Pāṇḍavas, who were, however, very dear to Lord Kṛṣṇa. The vicious hundred naturally met their doom.

Third Centum—Eighth Decad (III-8)
(Muṭiyāṉē)

Preamble

While trying to sustain himself by recounting the glory of the Bhāgavatas (Lord's devotees), as in the last decad, the Lord's glorious traits and wondrous deeds were also dwelt upon, side by side, in each stanza of that decad, in view of the irresistible appeal of the latter. It may also be recalled that, in III-6-10 we could notice the Āḻvār's deep anxiety to behold the Lord's pair of legs dangling down the chariot on the battlefield at Kurukṣetra. And now, the other sense-organs of the Āḻvār compete with the eyes

in the enjoyment of God. Each one of the Āḷvār's senses, limbs and faculties, would appear to have acquired intelligence, the stature of sentient beings, on a par with the Āḷvār's soul, with the result that there is the competitive exuberance on the part of the Āḷvār and his anatomical parts, come to life and capacitated for independent action, to get at the Lord individually and in the quickest possible manner and time. And, what is even more exciting is, each faculty aspires to transcend its functional limitations, resulting in an overlapping of functions as well. The hands would want to praise the Lord, the ears would long to drink deep of His nectarean charm, the eyes would like to offer Him fruits and flowers, so on and so forth. Each sense yearning for the delight experienced by the other senses, is a very extraordinary state of affairs indeed! Does not the snake which does not have ears, as such, see and hear through the eyes only, the eyes performing the dual function of seeing and hearing, though not simultaneously? Again, the up-grading of the senses and limbs to the stature of sentient beings can only be compared to the Āḷvār being described, now and then, as melting down or getting dried up or cut into pieces, although the soul is beyond the mischief of the elements, cannot be burnt out by fire or drenched by water, or dried up by air or cleaved by weapons—vide Bhagavad Gītā II-23 and 24.

The Āḷvār's plight, in this decad, is like that of the members of a family in a famine-stricken area, who try to snatch the little food that is available from each other 's mouth, each one of them, driven to extreme hunger, being mindful of his or her own appeasement. And here, the Āḷvār's senses, limbs and other faculties are vying with him, like unto the members of the famished family in question, for the appeasement of their own God-hunger and God-thirst. The Saint's yearning for the Lord's beatific vision is of such great depth that every moment of separation from the Beloved seems an age. His cry of anguish in this decad, melting even stony hearts has to be appreciated against this backround.

muṭiyāṉē! mūvulakum toḻutu ēttum cīr
aṭiyāṉē! āḻ kaṭalaik kaṭaintāy! puḷ-ūr
koṭiyāṉē! koṇṭal vaṇṇā! aṇṭattu umparil
neṭiyāṉē! eṉṟu kiṭakkum-eṉ neñcamē. (III-8-1)

Translation

My mind thaws down, calling you, my Lord!
As wearer of the crown regal, possessor
Of the feet by all the three worlds adored,
Churner of the deep sea, having on Your banner
The bird (Garuḍa), that also conveys You, cloud-hued.
Super-eminent among heaven's denizens and so on.

Note

The Āḷvār longs for the physical presence of the Lord whose resplendent crown proclaims His overlordship of the entire universe. Knowing full well that He can't be seen unless He deigns to come and present Himself, the Āḷvār's mind is, all the same, very much agitated, meditating on the various features and aspects of the Lord. The dovetailing of thoughts, as presented in this song, is indeed very interesting. Right from the crown on the Lord's head proclaiming His sovereignty, the Āḷvār comes down to His lovely pair of feet, fit to be adored by one and all, high and low, good and bad, without distinction. Unto those who adore His feet the Lord gives His whole body, in between, with which He performs many wonderful, breath-taking deeds for their sake. And for those, who are unable to come and worship His feet, He moves about on His unique vehicle, namely winged-bird, Garuḍa, the very embodiment of the Vedas and grants them 'darśan'. The blue-hued Lord, on His golden mount, the Garuḍa, affords a pleasant and attractive contrast in colours and the whole contour is exhilarating. Garuḍa, holding in his palms the feet of the Lord, proclaims the supremacy of the Lord, setting at naught the doubts of the Vedic scholars, confounded by the conflicting texts, some propounding the supremacy of Brahmā, the four-headed, some pointing to the supremacy of Śiva, a third set proclaiming the overlordship of Śrīman Nārāyaṇa and so on. These conflicting claims could, no doubt, be resolved by a careful study and Śrīman Nārāyaṇa's supremacy established, beyond doubt. But here is Garuḍa, with the Lord mounted on his shoulders and holding in his

palms His feet, the sole Refuge of one and all, simplifying our job and driving home the Lord's supremacy.

neñcamē nīḷ nakar āka irunta eṉ
tañcaṉē! taṉ ilaṅkaikku iṟaiyaic ceṟṟa
nañcaṉē! ñālam koḷvāṉ kuṟaḷ ākiya
vañcaṉē! eṉṉum eppōtum-eṉ vācakamē. (III-8-2)

Translation

My tongue always keeps uttering Your names, my Lord!
As my sole Refuge, in my mind firmly lodged,
As if it were a citadel big, the poison deadly
That destroyed Rāvaṇa, Chief of cool Laṅkā, the midget
(Vāmana) Who, on the sly, got hold of the worlds (from Bali).

Notes

(i) The Āḷvār's tongue prays unto the Lord.

"Sire, even as you have condescended to get into the Āḷvār's mind, pray, get into me, as well, so that I keep on uttering your names. I do hope the Āḷvār's mind has no monopolistic hold on you".

(ii) *My sole Refuge*: The Āḷvār's tongue is well aware of the fact that it is the Āḷvār's mind that has sought refuge in the Lord who, in turn, has come into it and stays there as if it is a huge citadel. And now, the tongue gives expression to this fact, regretting very much that the Earthlings do not address the Lord likewise. The pangs suffered by the Āḷvār are in respect of his separation from the Lord driving him in frantic search of the Lord, seeking the help of even inanimate things like mountains and oceans in the process. On the other hand, the pangs undergone by even Riṣīs of the eminence of Vaśiṣṭa and Vyāsa were due to their separation from their sons, as brought out vividly by the Purāṇas.

(iii) Mahābali was not destroyed like Rāvaṇa and the Supreme Lord even went to the former seeking alms, because he had the merit of being a great donor. The Āḷvār's tongue which began by describing the Lord's prowess

as Śrī Rāma, is now completely absorbed in the Lord's diplomacy as Vāmana.

vācakamē ētta, aruḷ ceyyum vāṉavar-tam
nāyakaṉē! nāḷ iḷam tiṅkaḷaik kōḷ viṭuttu
vēy-akam pāl veṇṇey toṭu uṇṭa āṉ-āyar
tāyavaṉē! eṉṟu taṭavum-eṉ kaikaḷē. (III-8-3)

Translation

My hands grope for you, the Celestials' overlord,
The one by my tongue solely lauded,
Who, as the cow-herd (Kṛṣṇa) ate butter sweet,
Stolen from the houses, bamboo-built,
In the beam of light by your teeth lit,
Sparkling like the rising Moon bright.

Notes

(i) The hands longing to experience the bliss, hitherto enjoyed solely by the tongue, addressed the Lord: "Oh, Lord of the Celestials! the Āḷvār's tongue praises you as well as the Celestials do. Why has this special favour been extended by you to the tongue alone and what is it that precludes you from making us also taste that bliss?"

(ii) Kṛṣṇa, the dark lad, broke into the dark interior of the houses built of bamboo in the pastoral village of Gokula, to steal the butter stored up in huge pots. Groping His way through in the dark, when He felt, by the touch of His hands, the presence of the pots, He would feel gratified and smile. His pearl-white teeth, sparkling with the extra-brilliance of the full Moon just released from an eclipse, would then illumine the place, helping Him to get at the butter and eat it up.

kaikaḷāl ārat toḻutu toḻutu uṉṉai
vaikalum māttiraip pōtum ōr vīṭu iṉṟi,
pai koḷ pāmpu ēṟi uṟai paraṉē! uṉṉai
meykoḷḷak kāṇa virumpum-eṉ kaṇkaḷē. (III-8-4)

Translation

Oh, Supreme Lord, resting on hooded Serpent,
My eyes long for the pleasure of my hands
Which have their fill of salutation unto you and besides
Wish to behold truly your form exquisite, with no respite.

Notes

(i) The Āḻvār's eyes pine for the experience of the hands besides their own. They long to enjoy the bliss of worshipping the Lord, thus performing the function of the hands. They also wish to truly (physically) behold His sweet Form, as distinguished from mere mental perception so that He can be touched and embraced.

(ii) That portion of this stanza (original) which deals with the intense worship of the Lord by the hands (repeatedly), is construed by a section of Śrī Vaiṣṇavas as stressing the necessity for worshipping the Lord several times over, as against the creed of many others, to prostrate, at a time, only once. The latter avoid the overtone or semblance of self-effort for the propitiation of the Lord, which militates against the basic principle of 'Prapatti' or loving surrender to the Lord's sweet grace. References to this very topic of worship elsewhere in 'Tiruvāymoḻi' (II-10-9 and IX-3-9), go to reinforce the latter code of discipline.

kaṇkaḷāl kāṇa varuṅkol! eṉṟu ācaiyāl,
maṇ koṇṭa vāmaṉaṉ ēṟa, makiḻntu cel
paṇ koṇṭa puḷḷiṉ ciṟaku oli pāvittu,
tiṉ koḷḷa ōrkkum kiṭantu-eṉ cevikaḷē. (III-8-5)

Translation

My ears long to see Vāmaṉaṉ (the Lord),
Who (from Bali) got hold of the land,
Moving on His merry mount, (Garuḍa)
And intently hear the sweet sound,
Of the tuneful wings of that bird.

Notes

(i) The Āḻvār's ears long both to see and hear and, therefore, drew up a picture, as above. The Lord moving on His merry mount, Garuḍa, must be seen by the ears which should also listen to the sweet strains emanating from the wings of that angelic bird, in flight, like unto the tuneful Sāma Veda (Bṛhat and Rantra Sāma).

(ii) As Vāmana or Trivikrama, the Lord did not press into service His standing vehicle, Garuḍa and yet, what is intended to convey here is that the Lord would fly, here and there, to reclaim His straying possessions.

(iii) *Intently hear*: Hearing the music of the wings of Garuḍa to the exclusion of everything else, not even the Lord or His mount. Even as the Āḻvār is now seen engrossed in the music of the wings of Garuḍa, Rukmiṇi was thrilled and enraptured by the sound from Śrī Kṛṣṇa's conch (Pāñcajanya), at the crucial moment near about the Devī's temple where she was anxiously awaiting Him, the great Rescuer. And then, when Sītā was tortured into believing that Rāma was dead. Rāvaṇa holding out before her the severed head of an illusory Rāma the heartening sound came to her from Śrī Rāma's bow, right from the sea-shore, and enabled her to see through the dirty game of Rāvaṇa.

cevikaḷāl āra niṉ kīrttik kaṉi eṉṉum
kavikaḷē kālap paṇ-tēṉ uṟaippat tuṟṟu,
puviyiṉmēl poṉ neṭum cakkarattu uṉṉaiyē
avivu iṉṟi ātarikkum-eṉatu āviyē. (III-8-6)

Translation

My spirit yearns to have its ears filled, oh Lord,
With songs that do your glory laud.
Sweet as fruits soaked in the honey of tunes appropriate
And enjoy on Earth with no respite,
Your form effulgent, wielding the discus large and exquisite.

Notes

(i) The Āḻvār's spirit either wants to grow ears or be transformed into ears to feast sumptuously on the songs singing the great glory of the Lord, the delicious fruits rendered sweeter, soaked and saturated with honey. If the songs are like unto fruits the tunes in which they are sung, sweeten them like honey.

(ii) Hearing such melodies as Sāma Veda and beholding the Lord with His effulgent discus are experiences pertaining to Heaven and yet, the Āḻvār aspires for them, right here, on Earth.

āviyē! ār amutē! eṉṉai āḻuṭait
tūvi am puḷ uṭaiyāy! cuṭar nēmiyāy!
pāviyēṉ neñcam pulampap palakālum
kūviyum kāṇappeṟēṉ-uṉa kōlamē. (III–8–7)

Translation

You are my very Soul, the nectar dear,
(Garuḍa), the bird with lovely plumes, my redeemer,
Is your glorious mount, You are the wielder
Of the discus resplendent, Your form exquisite,
This sinner couldn't behold, as yet,
Tho' many a time, my anguished mind called you out.

Notes

(i) From this stanza onwards, the Āḻvār narrates his own woes and wants. Hitherto, those of his senses were described. This is like the king narrating the miseries of his subjects first and then talking about his own.

(ii) It is difficult to live apart from one's life. The Lord is not only dear to the Āḻvār like his own life but is also extremely delicious, the rare Nectar.

(iii) Once the mind is bent towards God and steeped in enjoying Him, there is no question of the woes still sticking on. Perhaps such benefits accruing to other minds are denied to the Āḻvār's mind because of his heavy sins, according to him. While it would suffice if He is called but once, in this case, by calling Him out repeatedly, the Āḻvār has contravened his essential nature (Svarūpa) and yet, the Lord has not materialised, a double loss indeed!

kōlamē! tāmaraik kaṇṇatu ōr añcaṉa
nīlamē! niṉṟu eṉatu āviyai īrkiṉṟa
cīlamē! ceṉṟu celḷātaṉa muṉ nilām-
kālamē! uṉṉai en nāḷ kaṇṭukoḷvaṉē? (III–8–8)

Translation

Being lotus-eyed, with the unique complexion
Of a dark-blue mountain,
You are sheer beauty, Oh, Lord, Your loving condescension
Has my soul ensnared; Time you do ordain,
Past, present and future, you when can I attain?

Notes

(i) To the complaint made by the Āḻvār in the preceding song regarding the non-appearance of the Lord despite repeated calls, the Lord would appear to have observed that the Āḻvār should wait till the appropriate time for the bestowal of His grace. But the Āḻvār is quick to point out that 'Time' is also at the Lord's beck and call and He is the sole Controller of 'Time', made up of the past, the present and the future and that the plea of time-factor cannot, therefore, hold water.

(ii) The Lord is not merely beautiful but is beauty itself. And it is not beauty alone but beauty and goodness combined. It is the persevering goodness on the part of the Lord that has enabled the Āḻvār to cling to Him, overcoming his natural tendency to run away from Him, for fear of defiling Him.

(iii) *When can I attain you?* The Āḻvār prays to the Lord to specify the point of time at which he can behold and enjoy His physical presence, even as Śrī Rāma told Bharata that, on the completion of fourteen years, they will get together again.

koḷvaṉ nāṉ, māvali! mūvaṭi tā eṉṟa
kaḷvaṉē! kañcaṉai vañcittu, vāṇaṉai
uḷ vaṉmai tīra, ōr āyiram tōḷ tuṇitta
puḷ vallāy! uṉṉai eññāṉṟu poruntuvaṉē? (III-8-9)

Translation

Oh Lord, flying the bird (Garuḍa)!
You did, on the sly, from Māvali demand
Three strides of land;
Kañcaṉ's plans treacherous you foiled,
Vāṇaṉ's mental attitude you dispelled
And lopped his arms thousand;
When do I get unto you bound?

Notes

(i) Indra, Chief of the Devas was dispossessed of his Kingdom by Māvali (Mahā Bali), the Asura Chief. The former prayed to Lord Viṣṇu for the restoration of the lost Kingdom. But then, Mahā Bali was a generous donor, although he belonged to the Asura clan. So, the Lord had to adopt the peculiar method of seeking alms from Bali for getting back the lost domain. Not being conversant with the art of begging, the Lord, came down as Vāmana, the little lad, addressed Bali, by name, instead of the adulatory form of address, usually resorted to, by seasoned beggars. Bali didn't mind it so much, seeing that the supplicant was but a lad, but when the demand, made by the lad, was just three paces of land, the pompous donor didn't take it seriously. Looking at the indifference of Bali to the seemingly paltry demand, Vāmanamūrti reiterated His demand and compelled Bali's attention.

(ii) Kañcaṉ (Kamsa) kept himself in the background and hit upon many a treacherous plan to kill Śrī Kṛṣṇa. The felon of an uncle would not indulge in a frontal attack on Kṛṣṇa, the nephew, and was hoping that one or the other of the several agencies energised by him would be able to kill Kṛṣṇa, so that he (Kamsa) might bemoan, in public, the loss of his nephew. Alas! all his plans were thwarted by the Divine Lad, who vanquished the formidable array of His opponents and finally slew Kamsa himself.

(iii) Vāṇaṉ (Bāṇāsura), an avowed enemy of Lord Viṣṇu, was, however, an ardent votary of minor deities. The Lord, appeared before him, mounted on Garuḍa, disabused him (Bāṇāsura) of his heretical notion of God-head and revealed His supremacy, chopping off his thousand arms, like felling trees in the forest. See also detailed notes under III-10-4.

poruntiya mā marutiṉ iṭai pōya em
peruntakāy! uṉ kaḻal kāṇiya pēṟuṟṟu
varunti, nāṉ vācakamālai koṇṭu, uṉṉaiyē
iruntuiruntu ettaṉai kālam pulampuvaṉē? (III-8-10)

Translation

My bounteous Lord, the ' maruta ' trees huge, You broke,
Crawling in between; how long shall I cry out, without break,
Unto you, words of anguish, flowing like a wreath,
Eager in the extreme to behold your lovely feet!

Note

Sage Nārada saw Nalakūpar and Maṇigrīva, sons of Kubera, the Deity of Wealth, bathing in the river naked, and cursed them to become mere trees. Tied to a mortar by Queen Yasodha, as a punishment for His many pranks, Kṛṣṇa crawled on and hit the trees in question. The trees fell down and broke, releasing the regenerated Gandharvas from within. Sage Parāśara, who chronicled this episode in his Viṣṇupurāṇa, admired Śrī Kṛṣṇa's lotus eyes, in this context. The Āḻvār's mind is, however, steeped, as usual, in the feet of the crawling Lad.

pulampu cīr pūmi aḷanta perumāṉai
nalam koḷ cīr naṉ kurukūrc caṭakōpaṉ col
valam koṇṭa āyirattuḷ ivaiyum ōr pattu
ilaṅku vāṉ yāvarum ēṟuvar coṉṉālē. (III-8-11)

Translation

Those that recite these songs ten,
Out of the thousand of great literary excellence,
Composed by the richly endowed Kurukūr Caṭakōpaṉ,
In adoration of the munificent Lord who spanned the Universe,
Will, one and all, ascend the resplendent heaven.

Note

As the Āḻvār aspired for heavenly bliss in this decad those that recite these ten stanzas are also assured of their ascent to heaven.

Third Centum—Ninth Decad (III-9)
(Coṉṉāl Virōtam)

Preamble

(1) Among the myriads of the Lord's Creatures the human form is a rare gift of the Lord. Even so, the human form, thus dowered, has to be free from physical and mental handicaps. Even then, acquisition of a high degree of learning is rare and rarer still is the capacity for writing Verses. And then again, this extremely rare gift of verse-making has to be put to proper use but, more often than not, this talent is prostituted for the poet's selfish ends, by indulging in praise of the petty humans, as, for example, the Sanskrit work, entitled 'Pratāpa Rudrȳam'. The Āḻvār naturally deplores such misguided poets and advises them to give up their low base and elevate themselves to their legitimate stature, as the Lord's bards, soaring high, singing exclusively His great glory, in beautiful, metrical compositions. The Āḻvār mostly bemoans his separation from the Lord during those moments when communion with Him gets snapped, for one reason or another. But now and then, he turns his attention on the worldlings around, moved by their sad plight. In this decad, he exhorts the poets to harness their literary excellence to useful purpose by singing the many auspicious traits and wondrous deeds of the Lord and not to go the wrong way, eulogising the frail humans.

(2) The Āḻvār had addressed the worldlings earlier too, but with little success. In stanza 25 of his 'Periya Tiruvantāti', he exclaimed, in sheer disgust, that it was impossible to correct the worldlings and that he would, therefore, leave them severely alone, free to do whatever they liked. But then, his fellow-feeling asserts itself; his deep compassion for the suffering humanity wallowing in worldly life, was such that he just could not be indifferent to them and abandon them to their fate. That is why he turned his attention on them, now and then, in the midst of his own mystic experiences, alternating between union with and separation from God. The reasons prompting the Āḻvār to exhort the worldlings are three-fold, namely,

(i) the inter-relationship between Man and God is the same as that between God and the denizens of the high heaven and yet, while those in heaven partake of that perennial bliss emanating from the Lord, all the time, the worldlings are straying away from Him, bogged down in the difficult and miserable terrain of worldly life. The fundamental relationship between them and God, therefore, needs to be impressed upon the worldlings so that they may also be turned towards God;

(ii) The Āḻvār's inability to stand the sight of the suffering humanity caught up in the unenviable meshes of worldly life and

(iii) The Āḻvār's tender solicitude for the Earthlings overflows its continent and seeks to sustain itself by reclaiming even those given up by the Almighty Lord, as 'Incorrigibles'. (See aphorism 203 of Ācārya Hṛdayam).

(3) In the realm of God-love, the lovers' thoughts are always rivetted to Him, their lives are nestled in Him and they sustain themselves through mutual joy and enlightenment derived by talking about His great glory and listening to it by turns. The Āḻvār turns round in search of such enlightened company but he is sadly disappointed. He advises the men around, hoping to bring them round to his way of thinking, but finds that his advice has once again fallen on deaf ears. He, however, ends up this

decad on a complacent note, satisfied with his own role as God's poet, unlike the Earthlings who misuse their poetic talents.

coṉṉāl virōtam itu, ākilum colluvaṉ; kēṇmiṉō!
eṉ nāvil iṉ kavi yāṉ oruvarkkum koṭukkilēṉ-
teṉṉā teṉā eṉṟu vaṇṭu muraḷ tiruvēṅkaṭattu
eṉ āṉai, eṉ appaṉ, em perumāṉ uḷaṉākavē. (III-9-1)

Translation

Listen, Ye, men, let me my mind speak out
Although it may not by you be liked;
The songs sweet that from my tongue sprout
Laud none but my Liege-Lord
At Tiruvēṅkaṭam, by humming bees swarmed,
My Benefactor great, majestic like elephant;
Waste I shan't on anyone else my poetic talent.

Notes

(i) The Āḷvār does not straightaway say what he intends to preach, in this decad. He begins by stating his own case, namely, that his tongue shall sing exclusively the glory of the Lord at Tiruvēṅkaṭam, the holy Mount and its fauna and flora. The individual Soul is as good as non-existent, when it does not turn its thoughts on God and sustain itself by singing His glory. But, here is an extraordinary situation, the Lord stationing Himself in near-by Tiruvēṅkaṭan in order to sustain Himself through the songs sung by the Āḷvār. There is, therefore, no question of the Āḷvār turning his attention on any one else and, by saying so, he wants the men of the world to emulate him and follow in his foot-steps.

(ii) The Āḷvār is quite aware that calling upon the worldlings to desist from praising the frail humans, the so-called earthly Lords, will not be palatable to these short-sighted folks, as that would mean depriving them of the odds and ends, the petty favours they may otherwise obtain. Nevertheless, he advises them, unable to stand the sight of their suffering, like unto the advice tendered by

(i) Sītā, the Divine Mother to the demoniac Rāvaṇa,
(ii) Prahlāda unto Hiraṇya and the fellow—pupils
and (iii) Vibhīṣaṇa unto a terribly hostile Rāvaṇa.

uḷaṉākavē eṇṇi, taṉṉai oṉṟāka, taṉ celvattai
vaḷaṉā matikkum im māṉiṭattaik kavi pāṭi eṉ-
kuḷaṉ ār kaḷaṉi cūḻ kaṇṇaṉ kuṟuṅkuṭi meymmaiyē
uḷaṉāya entaiyai, entai pemmāṉai oḻiyavē? (III-9-2)

Translation

What use is there in composing hymns
In praise of these frail humans
Who think no end of themselves and their wealth ephemeral,
Without lauding my benefactor great, the Lord eternal,
Truly abiding in Kuṟuṅkuṭi, with many a pond and fields fertile?

Notes

(i) The Lord's wealth and His auspicious traits are unlimited, in dire contrast to the petty wealth possessed, for a short while, by the mortals who still think no end of themselves and their so-called possessions. It provokes the righteous indignation of the Āḷvār when he finds people running after the petty men and their equally petty wealth, as good as non-existent, without turning their minds on God (near at hand, full of auspicious traits) and singing His glory.

(ii) (a) *What to do*: The Lord Who stays in Heaven in His transcendental Form, Who reclines on the milk-ocean in His 'Vyūha' aspect, Who incarnated as Śrī Rāma, Kṛṣṇa and so on, who resides in His Iconic Form in Pilgrim centres like Kuṟuṅkuṭi, is alone praiseworthy and, therefore, the few of us gifted with poetic talents should compose hymns singing the Lord's glory, His countless auspicious

traits and wondrous deeds, cosmic wealth of unlimited dimensions etc.

(*b*) *What not to do*: Don't debase your poetic talent by composing poems gloriying the insignificant humans, importing merits where there is none and overlooking all their faults although they are too numerous to be ignored. Here is an interesting anecdote: A wealthy man, named, Cōḻa Brahmarāya, wrote out a commentary on 'Tiruvāymoḻi' and gave it to Nañcīyar for perusal and writing out the Foreword. The Saint did not, however, like to get involved in this, lest he should have to point out the mistakes and incur the displeasure of the glossator. He, therefore, passed it on to his disciple, Nampiḷḷai, who discreetly gave it back to the author after some time, complimenting him, more as a matter of formality, on his close adherence to Saint Nammāḻvār's philosophy. Thereupon, Cōḻa Brahmarāya felt unduly elated and went even to the extent of rating himself above Nammāḻvār on the ground that, with his superior talents, he was able to write out the commentary in the midst of the multifarious duties his high position demanded of him, while Nammāḻvār had nothing else to do when he composed 'Tiruvāymoḻi'. This brings to the fore the vanity of people who easily lose their heads, the more so, when they are surrounded by sycophants indulging in fulsome flattery.

(iii) '*Kuṟuṅkuṭi*', a pilgrim centre, in the deep south in Tamil Nadu, is also known as 'Vaiṣṇava Vāmana Kṣetra'. It was due to the grace of the Lord enshrined here that Nammāḻvar was born.

oḻivu oṉṟu illāta pal ūḻitōṟu ūḻi nilāvappōm
vaḻiyait tarum naṅkaḷ vāṉavar īcaṉai niṟkap pōy,
kaḻiya mika nalla vāṉ kavi koṇṭu, pulavīrkāḷ!
iḻiyak karuti, ōr māṉiṭam pāṭal eṉ āvatē? (III-9-3)

Translation

Ye, men of learning, What do you gain at all
By lauding the petty humans thro' songs superfine,
Shutting your eyes to the glory of the Overlord of Celestials,
Who shall unto you vouchsafe everlasting service divine?

Notes

(i) In his address to the poets of the world, the Āḻvār appeals to their good sense and discriminative faculty, to discern for themselves that the Supreme Lord, served and adored by the whole lot of them in the high heavens, the repository of innumerable auspicious qualities, is alone praiseworthy and one can praise Him till the end of time and still cannot exhaust His glory. And to those who adore Him He vouchsafes the eternal bliss of serving Him. Again poetry comes into its own only when it lauds His glory and not when it is profaned by making it the medium for eulogising the worthless humans.

(ii) And now, look at the other picture, dark and dismal. The so-called big men of the Earth these poets run after, get scent of the latter's approach and run away from them for fear of having to bestow gifts. And then, the poets overshoot the mark and make even people very much amenable to flattery suspect that they are either being fooled or the cap does not fit them. In this absurd chase for illusory gains, petty and ephemeral, the poets, far from edifying themselves, descend to the bottom-most depths of depravity, just the opposite of what they intend to achieve, all because they have chosen the wrong theme for their poems notwithstanding their literary excellence.

eṉ āvatu-ettaṉai nāḷaikkup pōtum-pulavīrkāḷ!
maṇṇā maṇicaraip pāṭip paṭaikkum perum poruḷ?
miṉ ār maṇi muṭi viṇṇavar tātaiyaip pāṭiṉāl,
taṉṉākavē koṇṭu, caṉmam ceyyāmaiyum koḷḷumē. (III-9-4)

Translation

Ye, poets, how long can the wealth immense you obtain,
By singing the praise of the mortals sustain
You all? better sing the glory of the Lord Supreme,
Wearing the crown resplendent set with gems,
The Devas' Sovereign; He will take you unto His fold,
Besides, you will from further births be freed.

Note

To the question put by the Āḻvār what the Earthly poets would gain by praising the petty humans, the poets say that their patrons do give them gifts, in appreciation of their composition. The Āḻvār, however, questions them again and asks them how long the wealth, they so obtain, will last. As a matter of fact, it takes the scholar quite some time to write out a book or compose a poem in adoration of these mortals and just when he sets out to meet the prospective donor, the shocking news comes of the latter having passed away. Even otherwise, the poets themselves do not live to enjoy the fruits of their labour and if they live long the gifts bestowed on them by the earthly patrons do not last long. Is it not therefore clear that the scholars should shift their base and concentrate on the glory of the Lord of the 'Nitya Sūrīs' (Eternal Heroes) in Heaven? The Lord, the one and only Giver, there being no gift beyond Him, will bestow on the hymnographers the choicest gift of eternal service unto Him and cut out the material body to sustain which they went about praising the frail mortals. The Lord has the unique reputation of elevating the subjects on a par with Him—the great giver with no restraint!

koḷḷum payaṉ illai, kuppai kiḷarttaṉṉa celvattai
vaḷḷal pukaḻntu, num vāymai iḻakkum pulavīrkāḷ!
koḷḷak kuṟaivu ilaṉ, vēṇṭiṟṟu ellām tarum kōtu il eṉ
vaḷḷal, maṇivaṇṇaṉ-taṉṉaik kavi colla vammiṉō. (III-9-5)

Translation

Ye, scholars, that do your tongue defile
In eulogy of the fellow-beings frail
Whose wealth is little better than a mound of filth!
Come and compose songs lauding the one, fully worth
All the praise you bestow on Him,
My Lord flawless, like unto blue gem,
The benefactor great, the donor supreme.

Notes

(i) It is indeed a deplorable exercise in futility to compose songs glorifying the fellow-beings who, far from being praise-worthy, will only have their many drawbacks exposed in the process, like unto the scrutiny of the contents of the dust-bin. Apart from not getting anything tangible and everlasting, from their mis-directed efforts, the poets lose their veracity by indulging in fulsome flattery. Thus, while there is no positive gain, there is indeed a positive loss.

(ii) *Flawless*: The Lord whose wealth is unlimited, is a flawless Giver, giving in plenty, without expecting anything in return. In His gifts there is no constraint; they are not merely abundant but exuberant.

vammiṉ pulavīr! num mey varuttik kaiceytu uymmiṉō;
im maṉ ulakiṉil celvar ippōtu illai nōkkiṉōm;
num iṉ kavi koṇṭu num num iṭṭā teyvam ēttiṉāl,
cem miṉ cuṭar-muṭi eṉ tirumālukkuc cērumē. (III-9-6)

Translation

Come, ye, poets, give up eulogising the humans,
There's none in this land big, as I now examine,
Wealthy enough to reward you well for your hymns;
'Tis but meet, you shall, by the sweat of your brow, earn;
If you praise the deity of your heart, even then,
Those promises shall reach my Tirumāl, with lustrous crown.

Notes

(i) *Come, Ye, poets*: The Āḻvār beckons the poets in the same way as a person invites persons caught up in a forest fire to come and have a dip in a pond, full of water, cool and deep. The poets, however, submit that they have

to eke out their livelihood by lauding the humans. The Āḻvār emphasises that they should not debase their talents and they might as well earn by physical labour. But then, the poets, not accustomed to bodily exertion, make out that composing poems was the easier of the two and that they should, therefore, be allowed to pursue their normal avocation. The Āḻvār does not, however, mince matters and rightly points out that there is none in this world wealthy enough to reward their talents suitably and that they should not undersell themselves.

(ii) *If you praise the Deity of your heart*: If you say that even if there be no wealthy person among the humans, Indra and other Devas could be considered wealthy and you would, therefore, compose poems singing their glory, well, whatever praise you heap on them will actually reach 'Tirumāl' (Lord Viṣṇu), as their Internal Controller, rather, it will be more appropriate to Him, being the one really praiseworthy. And, therefore, you had better praise the Supreme Lord, straightaway, instead of passing through intermediaries.

cērum koṭai pukaḻ ellai ilāṉai, ōr āyiram
pērum uṭaiya pirāṉai allāl, maṟṟu yāṉ kilēṉ-
māri aṉaiya kai, māl varai okkum tiṇ tōḷ eṉṟu,
pāril ōr paṟṟaiyaip paccaip pacum poykaḷ pēcavē. (III-9-7)

Translation

Utter I Can't damned white lies that project
The duds on Earth as the cloud munificent
And glorify their shoulders as mountains great;
Praise I can only my gracious Lord of glory unlimited,
Bearing a thousand names, my benefactor great.

Notes

(i) In the preceding songs, the Āḻvār addressed the world around but his advice fell on deaf ears, as before. In sheer disgust he withdraws unto himself, satisfied

that he could get back from the earthly poets, uncontaminated, like unto a person clearing a dacoit-infested area, without getting robbed.

(ii) *Thousand names*: Doesn't mean exactly thousand. Actually, it connotes innumerable names, even as His glory is inexhaustible.

(iii) *White lies*: Abominable lies, without the slightest tinge of truth.

vēyiṉ malipurai tōḷi piṉṉaikku maṇāḷaṉai
āya perum pukaḻ ellai ilātaṉa pāṭippōy,
kāyam kaḻittu, avaṉ tāḷ-iṇaikkiḻp pukum kātalaṉ,
māya maṉicarai eṉ colla vallēṉ, eṉ vāykoṇṭē? (III-9-8)

Translation

With passion deep to sing the limitless glory of the consort
Of Piṉṉai with shoulders pretty, for a long, long time
And then discard my body and attain His lovely feet,
Shall my tongue praise, at all, men in mundane moorings?

Notes

(i) Even as the Lord cut out the impediments in the way of attaining the charming Nappiṉṉai, He destroyed all the obstacles confronting the Āḻvār in attaining Him. When, at last, the material body is shaken off, the Āḻvār will acquire non-physical (*ultra*-mundane) body and serve the Lord, staying at His feet all the time. How could such a one ever think of singing the praise of the miserable mortals caught up in the mesh of mundane life?

(ii) The Lord's glory is unlimited and it can bear any amount of lauding for any length of time. Such being the case, there is hardly any scope for turning one's attention on others. Even if the Āḻvār be inclined to sing the praise of others, his tongue would not be a party to it.

vāykoṇṭu māṉiṭam pāṭa vanta kaviyēṉ allēṉ;
āykoṇṭa cīr vaḷḷal āḻip pirāṉ eṉakkē uḷaṉ;
cāy koṇṭa immaiyum cātittu, vāṉavar nāṭṭaiyum
nī kaṇṭukoḷ eṉṟu vīṭum tarum niṉṟuniṉṟē. (III-9-9)

Translation

I am not the poet born to extol the frail humans,
My tongue shall praise only the Lord holding the discus,
The Donor great, full of qualities auspicious,
Who presents Himself here in iconic Form delicious
And grants heavenly bliss in due course.

Notes

(i) The Āḻvār will not sing the praise of any but the extremely generous Lord. Although several Sages and Saints including the other Āḻvārs have sung the Lord's glory, Nammāḻvār's poems are hymns with a difference, of peerless excellence.

(ii) Although the Āḻvār has expressed his abhorrence of this harrowing abode with its evil propensities, in several places, earlier, he does not mind eking out his stay here, because of the Lord's living presence, right here, in His iconic Form, a bliss which compares favourable with, rather excels, heavenly bliss. As a matter of fact, the Āḻvār asked the Lord in stanza 53 of 'Periya Tiruvantāti' whether the heavely bliss which He grants, is by-any-means superior to the sweet contemplation of His infinite glory.

(iii) *In due course*: Nampiḷḷai is of the view that the heavenly bliss is granted by the Lord duly regulated with regard to the capacity of the recipient, just like a person who has been on a month-long fast, breaking the fast by stages before he resumes the normal in-take of food. This theme has already been elaborated upon, in the preamble to I-9. Other commentators have, however, interpreted the corresponding phrase in the original text of this stanza as 'In due course', that is, at the appropriate time.

niṉṟuniṉṟu pala nāḷ uykkum iv uṭal niṅkippōy,
ceṉṟuceṉṟu ākilum kaṇṭu, caṉmam kaḻippāṉ eṇṇi,
oṉṟioṉṟi ulakam paṭaittāṉ kavi āyiṉēṟku
eṉṟumeṉṟum iṉi maṟṟoruvar kavi ēṟkumē? (III-9-10)

Translation

Would it be appropriate if I, the poet of the zealous Lord
Who with the creation of the worlds goes on, full of hopes
That His subjects will some day (sooner or later) give up
The age-long shackles of the material body and attain Him,
Sang the glory of any one else, any more?

Notes

(i) At a time when the individual soul was lying defunct, just as inert as the non-sentient matter, devoid of the capacity to lament or enjoy, it was the Lord's boundless grace that put the Souls back on their feet, by endowing them with body, limbs and sense-organs, for eking out their progress. Against this background, the Āḻvār queries how the limbs, designed for the Lord's service, can be put to any other use.

(ii) In the ancient farm of 'Samsārā', the Lord, as an indefatigable and time-honoured Cultivator, has been raising crop after crop (world after world) hoping for a richer harvest of 'Bhakti' (devotion) every time. There are four different routes taken by the Souls when they depart from the material bodies, namely, (1) garbhagathi, (2) yāmyagathi, (3) Dhūmagathi and (4) Arcirādi gathi. Although the Lord looks forward to the subjects attaining Him through the last-mentioned ascent of 'Arcirādi gathi', they are mostly moving away from Him, through the other routes. But that does not deter Him and He gets on with His work of creation, hoping for better results, some day, sooner or later. The Āḻvār says that the Lord's unremitting labour has yielded the desired fruit, at least in his case, inasmuch as he has become the Lord's poet, singing exclusively His glory.

ēṟkum perum pukaḻ vāṉavar īcaṉ kaṇṇaṉ-taṉakku
ēṟkum perum pukaḻ vaṇ kurukūrc caṭakōpaṉ col
ēṟkum perum pukaḻ āyirattuḷ ivaiyum ōr pattu
ēṟkum perum pukaḻ colla vallārkku illai caṉmamē. (III-9-11)

Translation

Those that recite these praiseworthy songs ten,
Out of the praiseworthy thousand uttered
By the praiseworthy Kurukūr Caṭakōpaṉ,
Adoring Kaṇṇaṉ, the praiseworthy Lord,
Chief of the Celestials, will from births be freed.

Notes

(i) Those that recite these ten stanzas will not run the risk of being born again and hankering after the earthly patrons, lauding them.

(ii) The Lord is praiseworthy, as the Supreme Master of all the worlds.

The Āḷvār is praiseworthy, as the Lord's poet,

an appellation which fits him admirably;

Tiruvāymoḷi is praiseworthy, as the 'Dramiḍa Veda', truly reflecting the Lord like a mirror and this decad is praiseworthy, in as much as it enjoins upon every one to preserve, *in tact*, the essential nature (svarūpa) by singing exclusively the Lord's glory and prohibiting the profanation of the tongue and the poetic talent, in singing the praise of others.

Third Centum—Tenth Decad (III-10) (Caṉmam Palapala)

Preamble

The Lord is most eminently suited for laudation by virtue of His innumerable auspicious traits, wondrous deeds and vast possessions. And yet, the worldlings would not listen to the Āḷvār's advice, as in the preceding decad, to praise Him exclusively and desist from praising others. The Āḷvār, however, felt happy that he could at least get back from them unscathed without following in their footsteps. That spirit of complacence runs through this decad also with an extra gusto. The Āḷvār gives expression to the various benefits accrued to him through his total absorption in the Lord, namely, full and complete freedom from (1) want, (2) obstruction in the enjoyment of the Lord, (3) trouble, (4) sorrow, (5) affliction, (6) hindrance, (7) fatigue etc.

caṉmam palapala ceytu veḷippaṭṭu, caṅkoṭu cakkaram, vil,
oṇmai uṭaiya ulakkai, oḷ vāḷ, taṇṭu koṇṭu, puḷ-ūrntu, ulakil
vaṇmai uṭaiya arakkar acurarai māḷap paṭai poruta
naṉmai uṭaiyavaṉ cīr paravap peṟṟa nāṉ ōr kuṟaivu ilaṉē.
(III-10-1)

Translation

Singing the glory of the benevolent Lord
Who took many a birth, visible unto the eyes naked
Of the worldly, wielding the sword, the mace,
The pounder bright, bow, conch and discus
And slew, flying that bird (Garuḍa), the Asuras and the fiends
Free from wants of any kind am I indeed.

Notes

(i) While the Lord incarnates as a matter of grace we are born under compulsion, as the result of our past Karmas (deeds), to eke out our load. But by the Lord's spontaneous grace, the cycle of birth and rebirth will, some day, be brought to a halt in our case, and we won't have any more births, having once reached the Eternal Land (Heaven) whence there is no returning. The Lord, however, goes on taking births assuming the Form most appropriate to His needs. While recounting the Lord's Avatāras (incarnations) carrying about His person the unique weapons of transcendent fame, the Āḷvār feels that he is above wants of any kind. As a matter of fact, only those can suffer from wants, who are either devilish (āsurik) or are running after petty men for paltry gains.

(ii) *The fiends*: Those whose hearts are hard like a rock impervious to the exquisite charm of the Lord's enthralling Form, and who become the targets of His bow and not of His beauty.

kuṟaivu il taṭaṅ kaṭal kōḷ aravu ēṟi, taṉ kōlac centāmaraikkaṇ
uṟaipavaṉ pōla ōr yōku puṇarnta oḷi maṇi vaṇṇaṉ, kaṇṇaṉ,
kaṟai aṇi mūkku uṭaip puḷḷaik kaṭāvi, acuraraik kāynta ammāṉ
niṟai pukaḻ ēttiyum, pāṭiyum, āṭiyum yāṉ oru muṭṭu ilaṉē.
(III-10-2)

Translation

Hindrance there's none for me to sing,
Dance and enjoy my lustrous Lord, full of fame, resting
On the serpent-bed in the milk-ocean, full and broad,
Closing the red-lotus eyes, in deep thoughts absorbed,
Who came down here as Kaṇṇaṉ and destroyed
The fell Asuras, mounted on that bird with beak bloody.

Notes

(i) The Lord reposed on His serpent-bed in the Milk-ocean in '*Yoga niddhrā*'', preparatory to His incarnation as Śrī Kṛṣṇa to destroy the evil forces arrayed against the Godly men. The Āḻvār recounting, as he does, the great glory of Lord Kṛṣṇa, says that He has cut out all the impediments for his continual enjoyment of this bliss.

(ii) *In deep thoughts absorbed*: The Lord's 'Yoga niddhrā' referred to in (i) above is not the tāmasik variety of sleep but the highest form of activity, being the activisation of one's energies inward. Deeply absorbed in finding out the sure solvent for winning over the straying subjects, tossed up in 'the ocean of samsāra', and taking them ashore, He visualised the enchanting form which would cast its irresistible spell on the worldlings and wean them. It was this very form He assumed and came down as Kṛṣṇa. In his inimitable diction, Nampiḷḷai observes that the Lord's tongue got parched up due to His deep mental exertion in concerting the ways and means of redeeming the worldlings and just then, this enchanting form passed before His mind's eye, like the edible camphor relieving the dryness of the tongue in an exhilarating manner.

(iii) *That bird with bleak bloody*: The blood-stains on the beak of the mighty Garuḍa caused by his slaying the opponents, has not been wiped off, there being hardly any time left for it. Far from presenting an untidy appearance, these stains seem to be decorative.

muṭṭu il pal pōkattu oru taṉi nāyakaṉ, mūvulakukku uriya kaṭṭiyai, tēṉai, amutai, naṉ pālai, kaṉiyai, karumpu-taṉṉai, maṭṭu aviḻ taṉ am tuḷāy muṭiyāṉai vaṇaṅki, avaṉ-tiṟattup paṭṭa piṉṉai, iṟaiyākilum, yāṉ eṉ maṉattup parivu ilaṉē.
(III-10-3)

Translation

Mental afflictions have I absolutely none, absorbed in my Lord
Whose cool tuḷaci garland sheds honey in plenty;
Full of bliss uninterrupted, He is unto all the worlds
The peerless Master, delicious like honey and candy,
Pure milk, fruit, nectar, sugar cane and all that.

Notes

(i) The Āḻvār declares that, attracted as he is by the Lord's extraordinary sweetness and steeped in His service, he is absolutely free from mental afflictions. Even the heavenly bliss he is having right here.

(ii) *Of bliss uninterrupted*: Unlike the felicities of all the others, including the exalted Devas like Indra, Brahmā and Śiva, which have their limitations both in regard to the quantum and duration, the Lord is a perennial fountain of inexhaustible bliss.

(iii) While the cool, honey-studded tuḷaci garland brings out the sweetness of the Lord's Form (Divyamaṅgala vigraha), the other 'Rasas' (tastes) mentioned in the last two lines denote the highly delicious and delectable 'Ātma-svarūpa' or attributes of the Lord.

parivu iṉṟi, vāṇaṉaik kāttum eṉṟu, aṉṟu paṭaiyoṭum vantu etirnta, tiripuram ceṟṟavaṉum, makaṉum, piṉṉum aṅkiyum pōr tolaiya, poru ciṟaip puḷḷaik kaṭāviya māyaṉai, āyaṉai, poṉcakkarattu ariyiṉai, accutaṉaip paṟṟi, yāṉ iṟaiyēṉum iṭar ilaṉē. (III-10-4)

Translation

Distraction there's none whatever for me,
The votary of the wondrous Lord, Accutaṉ, (the steadfast),
Ari, whose discus lovely destroys the enemies;

As Kṛṣṇa, mounted on that valiant bird, He made them all eat the dust,
(Śiva), the destroyer of Tiripuram, his son and Aṅki, ranged opposite,
As sworn allies of the demoniac Vāṇaṉ, in a distant past.

Notes

(i) The Āḻvār brings out here that the lesser deities can hardly protect their votaries while the Supreme Lord, 'Accuta' sure and steadfast, will never give up His devotees. The Āḻvār, therefore, feels he is in a very happy position, absolutely safe, free from obstruction of any kind.

(ii) Uṣā, the charming daughter of Bāṇāsura (Vāṇaṉ, in Tamil) fell madly in love with a very handsome youth during a dream, and insisted that her mate Citralekhā, of extraordinary occult powers, should arrange for the physical presentation of the youth of her (Uṣā's) dream. The figure of the youth in question having been projected on paper from the canvas of Uṣā's mind, Citralekha identified him with Aniruddha, the grandson of Lord Kṛṣṇa and managed to lift the youngster bodily, along with the cot on which he was fast asleep, and put him right in Uṣā's private apartment. With her dream realised, Uṣā was in the land of ecstasy in the company of her lover but when Bāṇāsura came to know of this intrusion, great was his wrath and he bound Aniruddha by a 'Nāgāstra', a serpent-missile. The whole of Dwāraka, Lord Kṛṣṇa's township got agitated over the disappearance of Aniruddha and when Sage Nārada acquainted Śrī Kṛṣṇa with the youth's whereabouts, the mighty Garuḍa was commissioned from Heaven. Mounted on Garuḍa, Kṛṣṇa, accompanied by a host of others, sallied forth to Bāṇāsura's citadel to recover the missing youth. But Śiva, his son, Subramaṇya, their attendants, Agni (Aṅki, in Tamil) and other Devas ranged themselves on the side of Bāṇāsura, having vouchsafed protection unto him. Śrī Kṛṣṇa put Śiva out of action through a missile (Jrumbhanāstra) making him yawn all the time, drove the rest away and finally encountered the thousand-armed Bāṇāsura, lopping off his arms. A penitent Śiva then prayed to Śrī Kṛṣṇa, and at the former's request, Bāṇāsura was let off with a mere four arms, as against the thousand, he had before. The grateful Bāṇāsura gave his daughter in marriage to Aniruddha and the wedding was celebrated with great eclat.

Śiva's part in this episode was indeed most unfortunate. When the milk-ocean was churned Lord Viṣṇu functioned in eight different forms. Likewise, when Śiva encountered Tripurāsuras and destroyed their flying citadels, Viṣṇu imparted the requisite strength to Śiva's bow, toughness to the bow-string, sharpness to the arrow and above all, He was within him as the Internal Controller, as ever. But when Śiva was extolled by the ignorant poets as the destroyer of Tripura, he got infatuated to such an extent that he was impudent enough to think in terms of taking up arms against Kṛṣṇa, Lord Viṣṇu, incarnate and allying with Bāṇāsura. No doubt, Siva had to repent for it, as seen from the episode cited above.

(iii) *Distraction, there is none for me*: Despite being Lord Kṛṣṇa's grandson, Aniruddha had to suffer imprisonment at the hands of Bāṇāsura, as in the above episode. But, as the Lord's ardent devotee, the Āḻvār doesn't have to suffer any such indignity.

iṭar iṉṟiyē, oru nāḷ oru pōḻtil ellā ulakum kaḻiya,
paṭar pukaḻp pārttaṉum vaitikaṉum uṭaṉ ēṟa, tiṉ-tēr kaṭavi,
cuṭar-oḷiyāy niṉṟa taṉṉuṭaic cōtiyil vaitikaṉ piḷḷaikaḷai
uṭaloṭum koṇṭu koṭuttavaṉaip paṟṟi, oṉṟum tuyar ilaṉē.
(III-10-5)

Translation

In me there isn't the slightest tinge of grief,
Having attained my gracious Lord who delivered
The lost sons of a 'Vaidik' back to him quite safe,

Taking him and Arjuna in a chariot strong that covered
The upper regions, reclaiming from the Heaven resplendent
the sons (four).

Notes

(i) The Āḻvār asserts that there is no question of his being confronted by grief of any kind, having taken sole refuge in the Supreme Lord, Who, as Kṛṣṇa, went right into Heaven, reclaimed the four missing sons of a 'Vaidik' (Brahmin) and delivered them back to him as promised.

(ii) The 'Vaidik', referred to in (i) above, lost three sons successievly; immediately they emerged from the mother's womb, the babes disappeared. When his wife conceived again, the Brahmin prayed to Śrī Kṛṣṇa to ensure the safe retention of at least the current progeny. At the time of confinement, however, Arjuna dissuaded Kṛṣṇa from disengaging himself from a ritual currently going on and undertook to look after the Vaidik's affair himself. But then, Arjuna failed miserably despite his standing guard at the Vaidik's house, blocking, with arrows, entry into the house by any outsider, not even air. The progeny disappeared as usual soon after emergence from the mother's womb.

The Vaidik bitterly reproached Arjuna but Kṛṣṇa appeased the grief-stricken brahmin, promising to get him back all the four missing children. Just in one day the three of them ascended the upper regions in a mighty chariot specially commissioned for the purpose. Detaining the Vaidik, Arjuna and the Chariot Just outside Heaven, Śrī Kṛṣṇa alone entered the dazzling Heaven and located all the four children in the company of His Divine Consorts there, who longed for seeing Him in the exquisite Form of Kṛṣṇa and lifted the Vaidik's sons, one by one, unto Heaven, in order to secure their objective. The children were thus recovered, safe and sound, and restored to the Vaidik, a grand and thrilling feat which none but the Supreme Lord could perform.

tuyar il cuṭar-oḷi taṉṉuṭaic cōti niṉṟa vaṇṇam niṟkavē,
tuyaril maliyum maṉicar piṟaviyil tōṉṟi, kaṇ kāṇa vantu,
tuyaraṅkaḷ ceytu, taṉ teyvanilai ulakil puka uykkum ammāṉ,
tuyaram il cīrk kaṇṇaṉ, māyaṉ pukaḻ tuṟṟa yāṉ ōr tuṉpam ilaṉē.
(III–10–6)

Translation

Absolutely trouble-free am I, singing the glory great
Of my wondrous Lord, full of auspicious traits
And devoid of qualities base, who did, as Kaṇṇaṉ, come down
In all that splendour supernal, amidst sorrow-stricken humans
And spread, in this world, His glory unique, attracting everyone.

Notes

(i) Though born among humans as Śrī Kṛṣṇa, son of Vasudeva, the Lord retained His Supernal Form and traits *in tact* as He assumes the Form of His choice, unlike the bodies He dowers on us under compulsion, according to our Karma. Making Himself visible to the worldlings and mixing with them freely, He displays His auspicious traits in abundance. Meditating on these great qualities of Lord Kṛṣṇa, the Āḻvār affirms that he has no worries whatsoever.

(ii) The Lord attracts the devout by His auspicious traits and the ungodly men by exhibiting His strength and prowess.

(iii) Even while performing such functions as running an errand and driving the chariot, Śrī Kṛṣṇa displayed His transcendental glory, a rare thing indeed for the worldlings to have, right here, a taste of what obtains in Heaven.

tuṉpamum iṉpamum ākiya ceyviṉai āy, ulakaṅkaḷum āy,
iṉpam il vem naraku āki, iṉiya nal vāṉ cuvarkkaṅkaḷum āy,
maṉ pal uyirkaḷum āki, palapala māya mayakkukkaḷāl
iṉpuṟum iv viḷaiyāṭṭu uṭaiyāṉaip peṟṟu, ētum allal ilaṉē.
(III–10–7)

Translation

Sorrows have I none, as I commune
With my Lord, the Sportive Contreller overall,

Of the Creatures many, their pleasure and pain,
Their acts, good and bad, the pleasant Svarg and dire hell.

Note

The Lord who delights in the creation of the Universe as a pastime, is in over-all control of the acts, good and bad, of His subjects, the reward and punishments therefor, the seats of enjoyment of the reward (Svarg) and infliction of punishment (Hell) and so on. Having attained Him, the Āḷvār avers that he is free from sorrows of any kind, rid of the bonds of Karma, the fountain source of all sufferings, through His unfailing grace.

allal il iṉpam aḷavu iṟantu eṅkum aḻaku amar cūḻ oḷiyaṉ,
alli malar-makaḷ pōka mayakkukkaḷ ākiyum niṟkum ammāṉ,
ellai il ñāṉattaṉ, ñāṉam aktē koṇṭu ellāk karumaṅkaḷum cey
ellai il māyaṉai, kaṇṇaṉait tāḷ paṟṟi, yāṉ ōr tukkam ilaṉē.
(III-10-8)

Translation

I have nothing to worry, worshipping, as I do, the feet compact
Of the Lord of bliss unalloyed and beauty unlimited,
Permeating all over, who is rapturous in contact
With (Lakṣmī), the lotus-born, of radiant knowledge unlimited
By which He, the work-a-day worlds does create
Who did as wondrous Kaṇṇaṉ of glory unlimited incarnate.

Notes

(i) *Bliss unalloyed*: This obtains only in Heaven. Even Svarg, the seat of enjoyment of the reward for one's good acts, known to be pleasurable, does not provide unalloyed happiness, as the inmates are haunted by the fear of being thrown out at the end of the prescribed tenure of their stay there. This fear gathers momentum every time a fellow-being is hurled down.

(ii) The Lord is, no doubt, the natural embodiment of bliss (Ānanda) but it is only His conjunction with Lakṣmī of ravishing beauty that confers on Him, the bliss supreme (Paramānanda). It is this blissful conjunction, *par excellence*, that provides the necessary incentive for

His creation of the Sportive Universe (Līla Vibhūti). Although He could create the entire Universe by a mere resolve (Saṅkalpa), He came down as Kṛṣṇa, and enthralled every one by His entrancing beauty. As an ardent worshipper of Lord Kṛṣṇa, the Āḷvār confidently asserts that he has absolutely nothing to worry about.

tukkam il ñāṉac cuṭar-oḷi mūrtti, tuḻāy alaṅkal-perumāṉ,
mikka pal māyaṅkaḷāl vikirtam ceytu, vēṇṭum uruvu koṇṭu,
nakka pirāṉōṭu ayaṉ mutalāka ellārum evaiyum taṉṉuḷ
okka oṭuṅka viḻuṅka vallāṉaip peṟṟu, oṉṟum taḷarvu ilaṉē.
(III-10-9)

Translation

Fatigue have I none, having attained my Lord beatific,
Of knowledge pure and form resplendent, with tuḻaci garland bedecked,
Who, by His wondrous prowess, assumes any form He likes and performs
Many a wondrous deed and inside His stomach contains all at once
(During deluge) Nakkapirāṉ (Śiva), Ayaṉ (Brahmā) and all other things and beings.

Note

It is only the Omnipotent Lord who can achieve the seemingly impossible and blend into harmony the incompatibles, such as floating on a tender fig-leaf over the vast watery expanse as a mere babe, holding in its stomach all the world with their variegated contents, all things and beings. Singing the glory of the great Sustainer, the Āḷvār is naturally free from fatigues.

taḷarvu iṉṟiyē eṉṟum eṅkum paranta taṉimutal ñāṉam oṉṟāy
aḷavu uṭai aimpulaṉkaḷ aṟiyāvakaiyāl aruvu āki niṟkum
vaḷar oḷi īcaṉai, mūrttiyai, pūtaṅkaḷ aiṉtai, iru cuṭarai,
kiḷar oḷi māyaṉai, kaṇṇaṉait tāḷ paṟṟi, yāṉ eṉṟum kēṭu ilaṉē.
(III-10-10)

Translation

Never can any harm alight on me, adoring the feet
Of Kaṇṇaṉ, my wondrous Lord of form exquisite,
With radiance ever-expanding, who permeates at all times,
All things, with no effort, of knowledge supreme,
Controller of the elements five, whom the senses five can't
comprehend.

Note

The Lord is everywhere, permeating effortlessly everyone and everything, at all times and yet, He is not tainted by them nor can He, in His universal Form, be comprehended by the five senses, Far from being tainted by the persons and things wherein He stays. His resplendence goes up all the time and His exclusive, auspicious Form (Divya maṅgala vigraha) is of matchless grace and beauty; Adoring Him of such great prowess, the Āḻvār is naturally well beyond the mischief of harm of any kind.

kēṭu il viḻup pukaḻk kēcavaṉai kurukūrc caṭakōpaṉ coṉṉa
pāṭal ōr āyirattuḷ ivai oru pattum payiṟṟa vallārkaṭku avaṉ
nāṭum nakaramum naṉkuṭaṉ kāṇa, nalaṉiṭai ūrti paṇṇi,
viṭum peṟuttit taṉ mūvulakukkum tarum oru nāyakamē.
(III-10-11)

Translation

Those that can recite these songs ten,
Out of the thousand composed by kurukūr Caṭakōpaṉ
In adoration of Kēcavaṉ of undying fame.
Will in His service be enlisted and granted by Him
Heavenly bliss, well in sight of the men of this world,
And made the sole *monarchs* of all His worlds.

Note

Those that can recite these ten stanzas will be blessed by the Lord, right here, with spiritual fervour of universal fame and, on their ascent to Heaven, He would invite them to rule over it.

THE CENTUM, IN RETROSPECT
(DECAD-WISE SUMMARY)

(III-1): *In the opening decad of this Centum*, the Āḻvār, who had expounded the glory of mount Māliruñcōlai in the immediately preceding decad (II-10), drinks deep of the nectarean charm and enthralling beauty of Lord Aḻakar (The Beautiful), enshrined there;

(III-2): *In the second decad*, we note the Āḻvār's mental agony due to his inability to enjoy the Lord in His Iconic Form *in toto* and give the fullest expression to such enjoyment. God is limitless and to enjoy His boundless beatific vision in full, would be attempting the impossible, namely, limiting the limitless. The Āḻvār is, however, invited by the Lord to enjoy His Iconic Form at Tiruvēṅkaṭam to his heart's content;

(III-3): *In the third decad*, the Āḻvār seeks to render blemishless service unto the Lord at lovely Tiruvēṅkaṭam in ever so many ways, without break, even as a person, feeling the pinch of hunger and with food packet in hand sets the table, as soon as he comes across a suitable spot with plenty of shade and water;

(III-4): Profoundly impressed by the intensity of the Āḻvār's yearning for Divine Service, the Lord threw into focus His unique faculty of omnipresence, pervading all things, all over and at all times. It is the Lord's immanence, the astounding phenomenon in front of him, that the Āḻvār attempts to sing *in the fourth decad*, with bewildering amazement;

(III-5): *In the fifth decad*, the Āḻvār extols the kindred souls, thrown into a state of ecstasy, enraptured by the contemplation of the Lord's wondrous deeds and auspicious traits, moving about singing and dancing, and condemns unreservedly those that remain callously indifferent, unmoved by and impervious to the Lord's glory;

(III-6): Expounding the Lord's extreme 'Saulabhya' (easy-accessibility) in His Iconic manifestation, the Āḻvār exhorts, *in the sixth decad*, the fellow-beings out of deep compassion and love to worship the Lord in His Iconic Form and make good their lives;

(III-7): The Āḻvār's advice, as in the sixth decad, having once again fallen on deaf ears, he drowns his disappointment, *in the seventh decad*, in the blissful contemplation of service unto the Lord's devotees, the logical culmination of service unto the Lord, declaring that he is the vassal of those that stand last in the chain of the Lord's devotees, sure and steadfast, who are enthralled by the bewitching beauty of the Lord holding the charming discus in hand;

(III-8): *In the eighth decad,* one witnesses a very extraordinary state of affairs, each one of the Āḷvār's senses yearning for the delight experienced by the other senses; in its competitive exuberance to enjoy the Lord, each faculty aspires to transcend its functional limitations. Thus the hands would want to praise the Lord, the ears would long to drink deep of the nectarean charm of the Lord, the eyes would like to offer Him fruits and flowers, so on and so forth;

(III-9): *The ninth decad* contains the Āḷvār's exhortation to the poets of the world not to debase their rare poetic talents by eulogising the frail humans for the sake of petty gains, flimsy and fleeting, or the minordeities, but to elevate themselves to their legitimate stature as the Lord's bards, soaring high, singing exclusively the Supreme Lord's great glory in beautiful metrical compositions;

(III-10): Once again, the worldings would not listen to the Āḷvār's advice as in the ninth decad and yet, it was no mean consolation for him that he could at least get back from them unscathed, without being contaminated by them. *In the concluding decad of this Centum,* the Āḷvār gives expression to the various benefits accrued to him through his total absorption in the Lord, namely, full and complete freedom from (1) want, (2) obstruction in the enjoyment of the Lord, (3) trouble, (4) Sorrow, (5) affliction, (6) fatigue etc.

BOOK IV

Fourth Centum–First Decad (IV-1)
(Oru nāyakamāy)

Preamble

The last centum ended on a very happy note, an exuberant Āḷvār, gratefully conscious of the felicities showered on him by a loving Lord, declaring that he is above wants of any kind and free from afflictions of any kind. Just the opposite is, however, the plight of the 'Samsāris' (worldlings), and it was out of an irrepressible fellow-feeling and deep compassion that the Āḷvār tried to bring them all, on a par with him and advised them in III-9 (coṉṉāl virōtam) to give up running after the petty humans and their petty wealth. The desired response was, however, not forthcoming presumably because the men whom the Āḷvār then addressed were thinking in terms of somehow enriching themselves by waiting on the so called earthly potentates. And yet, the Āḷvār's tender solicitude turns his attention on to them once again, and that too, so soon. In this decad, he impresses upon his addressees that, for all their mountainous labours, they get much less than a mouse, in return, the so-called wealth they acquire being after all much-too-flimsy and fleeting. So saying, the Āḷvār calls upon these straying subjects to realise the importance of holding on to the Supreme Lord as an end in itself, the wealth supreme and everlasting.

In VII-16 of Bhagavad Gītā, the Lord has referred to four types of votaries propitiating Him. These are: (1) Ārta, the sorrow stricken ones who wish to get back their lost wealth; (2) *Arthārthī,* the poor men craving for wealth and power, (3) Jijñāsu, the seeker of the self, that is, emancipation from the cycle of birth and death and enjoyment of the disembodied soul in the ultra-mundane sphere, known as 'Kaivalya Mokṣa' and (4) Jñāni, the gnostic, fully alive to the essential nature of the Individual Soul as the sole servitor of the Lord, seeking the Lord as the final goal and looking upon Him as the sole Means for attaining the end in view.

All the four categories of supplicants have, however, been labelled as 'Sukṛts' (persons with good deeds to their credit) although all but the 'Jñānis' would, strictly speaking, deserve to be

(III-8): *In the eighth decad,* one witnesses a very extraordinary state of affairs, each one of the Āḻvār's senses yearning for the delight experienced by the other senses; in its competitive exuberance to enjoy the Lord, each faculty aspires to transcend its functional limitations. Thus the hands would want to praise the Lord, the ears would long to drink deep of the nectarean charm of the Lord, the eyes would like to offer Him fruits and flowers, so on and so forth;

(III-9): *The ninth decad* contains the Āḻvār's exhortation to the poets of the world not to debase their rare poetic talents by eulogising the frail humans for the sake of petty gains, flimsy and fleeting, or the minordeities, but to elevate themselves to their legitimate stature as the Lord's bards, soaring high, singing exclusively the Supreme Lord's great glory in beautiful metrical compositions;

(III-10): Once again, the worldings would not listen to the Āḻvār's advice as in the ninth decad and yet, it was no mean consolation for him that he could at least get back from them unscathed, without being contaminated by them. *In the concluding decad of this Centum,* the Āḻvār gives expression to the various benefits accrued to him through his total absorption in the Lord, namely, full and complete freedom from (1) want, (2) obstruction in the enjoyment of the Lord, (3) trouble, (4) Sorrow, (5) affliction, (6) fatigue etc.

BOOK IV

Fourth Centum—First Decad (IV-1)
(Oru nāyakamāy)

Preamble

The last centum ended on a very happy note, an exuberant Āḻvār, gratefully conscious of the felicities showered on him by a loving Lord, declaring that he is above wants of any kind and free from afflictions of any kind. Just the opposite is, however, the plight of the 'Samsāris' (worldlings), and it was out of an irrepressible fellow-feeling and deep compassion that the Āḻvār tried to bring them all, on a par with him and advised them in III-9 (coṉṉāl virōtam) to give up running after the petty humans and their petty wealth. The desired response was, however, not forthcoming presumably because the men whom the Āḻvār then addressed were thinking in terms of somehow enriching themselves by waiting on the so called earthly potentates. And yet, the Āḻvār's tender solicitude turns his attention on to them once again, and that too, so soon. In this decad, he impresses upon his addressees that, for all their mountainous labours, they get much less than a mouse, in return, the so-called wealth they acquire being after all much-too-flimsy and fleeting. So saying, the Āḻvār calls upon these straying subjects to realise the importance of holding on to the Supreme Lord as an end in itself, the wealth supreme and ever-lasting.

In VII-16 of Bhagavad Gītā, the Lord has referred to four types of votaries propitiating Him. These are: (1) Ārta, the sorrow stricken ones who wish to get back their lost wealth; (2) *Arthārthī,* the poor men craving for wealth and power, (3) Jijñāsu, the seeker of the self, that is, emancipation from the cycle of birth and death and enjoyment of the disembodied soul in the ultra-mundane sphere, known as 'Kaivalya Mokṣa' and (4) Jñāni, the gnostic, fully alive to the essential nature of the Individual Soul as the sole servitor of the Lord, seeking the Lord as the final goal and looking upon Him as the sole Means for attaining the end in view.

All the four categories of supplicants have, however, been labelled as 'Sukṛts' (persons with good deeds to their credit) although all but the 'Jñānis' would, strictly speaking, deserve to be

termed as 'Dhuṣkṛt', craving, as they do, for the lower or inferior fruits. This is because all of them seek whatever they want from the Supreme Lord, instead of committing the further transgression of cooling their heels elsewhere, that is, at the door steps of the minor deities or the so-called earthly magnates. Of course, the Lord would not mince matters any more, and He brings out, in un-ambiguous terms, the special greatness and glory of the 'Jñāni' in the three succeeding ślokas (VII-17 to 19). The Jñāni, engrossed in the Lord as the highest goal, is dear to the Lord beyond words, and is looked upon by the Lord as His very self. The Āḻvār is only echoing this theme in this decad, pointing out the Superior stance of the Jñāni, which the people of the world should strive after, and deprecating the pursuit after the intransient riches and the inferior goal of 'Kaivalya Mokṣa'.

For facility of recapitulation it may be pointed out that the Āḻvār has been similarly addressing the world, off and on, with an eye on its uplift and deliverance, vide I-2, II-8, III-6 and III-9.

oru nāyakamāy ōṭa ulaku uṭaṉ āṇṭavar,
karu nāy kavarnta kālar, citaikiya pāṉaiyar,
peru nāṭu kāṇa, immaiyilē piccai tām koḷvar-
tirunāraṇaṉ-tāḷ kālamperac cintittu uymmiṉō. (IV-1-1)

Translation

The monarchs great who did once hold sway supreme,
Will, under the nose of the worlds they ruled, seek alms
With broken bowls in hand, on legs by black dogs bitten.
Be quick, therefore, ye, men, to meditate on the feet
Of Tirunāraṇaṉ where indeed lies your salvation.

Notes

(1) The first three lines speak about the *ephemeral* wealth while the remaining lines deal with *Eternal* wealth. That the earthly riches, whatever their magnitude, are evanescent, has been brought out by citing the well-known example of mighty monarchs being reduced, in one and the same span of life, to abject poverty, seeking alms under cover of night. Treading upon black dogs during nights, the distinguised beggars get bitten of them but desist

from crying out their pain for fear of attracting public attention. But then, the earthen begging bowls drop down from their hands and the resultant noise draws huge crowds witnessing the pathetic plight of their erstwhile monarch. Oh, what a pitiable contrast between these broken earthen bowls and the decorated bowls of gold they ate from before; people who couldn't have dreamt of coming face to face with the monarch or would have to wait for months before gaining entry into the Palace gates, could now see him right on the road, with an apology of a begging bowl held by the hand which once doled out large territories to petty princes and nobles. So then, the Āḻvār exhorts the men around to adore the feet of Śrīman Nārāyaṇa, the Donor, *par excellance* and attain salvation, the everlasting opulence of Divine Service.

This decad is in propitiation of the Deity, known as 'Veda Nārāyaṇa', enshrined in Toṭṭiyam Tirunārāyaṇapuram, in Musiri Taluk, Tiruchirapalli District, in Tamil Nadu. Tradition has it that, during his stay of twelve years in Tirunārāyaṇapuram (Melkōṭ), in Karnāṭaka State, Śrī Rāmānujācārya affectionately bestowed this decad unto the Deity of that pilgrim centre, going by the name 'Tirunārāyaṇaṉ'.

uymmiṉ tiṟaikoṇarntu eṉṟu ulaku āṇṭavar, immaiyē
tam iṉcuvai maṭavāraip piṟar koḷḷat tām viṭṭu,
vem miṉ oḷi veyil-kāṉakam pōyk kumaitiṉparkaḷ-
cem miṉ muṭit tirumālai viraintu aṭi cērmiṉō. (IV-1-2)

Translation

Lose no time in worshipping 'Tirumāl', with lustrous crown,
Seeing that the earthly overlords who did dominate for long,
With many a minor Chief paying unto them tributes, grow forlorn,
Losing, in this very birth, their kingdoms and consorts dear
And eke out miserable existence in the formidable forest yonder.

Notes

(i) Even those mighty kings who held sway for long, keeping under their heels many a chieftain forced to pay them tributes, lose their vast kingdoms and become helpless spectators when the lovely damsels kept in their proud harem, are forcibly seized by others under their very nose. If this happens to the mighty overlords what to say about the lesser men and their so-called riches? The Āḻvār, therefore, calls upon his fellow-beings to worship the feet of Lord Viṣṇu (Tirumāl) and attain Him, the Eternal Wealth, the inexhaustible fountain of perennial bliss.

(ii) The Paṇḍavas who celebrated the 'Rājasūya Yāga' with great pomp and eclat, had to retire into the forest and their wife, Draupadi, was badly handled under their very nose.

(iii) Unto those who seek Him, the Lord is there to part with His very crown; there are His consorts to plead for us and get from the Lord His choicest favours and yet, the default lies on our past, in not hastening.

aṭi cēr muṭiyiṉar āki aracarkaḷ tām toḻa,
iṭi cēr muracaṅkaḷ muṟṟattu iyampa, iruntavar,
poṭi cēr tukaḷāyp pōvārkaḷ; ātalil, nokkeṉak
kaṭi cēr tuḻāy muṭik kaṇṇaṉ kaḻalkaḷ niṉaimiṉō. (IV–1–3)

Translation

The earthly overlords of empires mighty, who care least
For the kings who on them wait days on end and get lost
In singing and dancing, the drums in the courtyards beating fast,
Will, in no time, get ground to mere bits of dust;
Be quick, therefore, to meditate on the feet of Kaṇṇaṉ,
Wearing tuḻaci garland full of fragrance sweet on His Crown.

Note

The supercilious overlords who once took pride in despising their subordinates, will soon be reduced to a predicament

wherein they will, in turn, be despised by others. From the durbar hall to the dust is not a long way off and these men of erstwhile eminence become imperceptible non-entities, as good as the life-less dust men tread upon. The Āḻvār, therefore, advises us to spurn the ephemeral wealth of the world and switch on to the feet of the Lord wearing the sweet tuḻaci garland on His crown, the symbol of His undisputed sovereignty over one and all.

niṉaippāṉ pukil, kaṭal ekkaliṉ nuṇmaṇalil-palar
eṉaittōr ukaṅkaḷum iv ulaku āṇṭu kaḻintavar,
maṉaippāl maruṅku aṟa māytal allāl, maṟṟuk kaṇṭilam–
paṉait tāḷ mata kaḷiṟu aṭṭavaṉ pātam paṇimiṉō. (IV–1–4)

Translation

The number of those that ruled for long this land
And into oblivion passed, leaving no trace behind
Of their erstwhile possessions and things around,
Far exceeds the particles of the sea-sand minute;
So then, worship the feet of the one Who slew
(Kuvalayāpīḍa) the monstrous elephant in rut.

Note

When a mighty tree comes crashing down, it destroys quite a few things all around, as well. Likewise, when the kingdoms of the earthly Lords perished the territories around also got wiped off, the unrelenting ravage of time! The Āḻvār is emphasising the intransigence of the mundane wealth in so many ways, song after song. Side by side, he stresses the positive need for worshipping Viṣṇu, the Supreme Lord, the Eternal Wealth. During His avatāra as Kṛṣṇa, the Lord slew that monstrous elephant in rut set on Him by Kamsa, the felon of an uncle, by pulling out the tusks.

paṇimiṉ tiruvaruḷ eṉṉum am cītap paim pūm paḷḷi
aṇi meṉ kuḻalār iṉpak kalavi-amutu uṇṭār
tuṇi muṉpu nāla, pal ēḻaiyar-tām iḻippa, celvar–
maṇi miṉṉu mēṉi nam māyavaṉ pēr colli vāḻmiṉō. (IV–1–5)

Translation

Sing and subsist on the holy names of our wondrous Lord,
Shining like blue-gem, seeing that those who seek
The bed, cool and lovely and pine for getting locked
In the sweet embrace of the damsels sleek,
With fine stresses of hair, become poor and under-clad,
Going about begging, by many a woman ridiculed.

Note

Even the glamour of sensual pleasures wears out soon; with energy dissipated and wealth gone, the participants cut a sorry figure, becoming the objects of ridicule by those very persons who once adored them. The material wealth and the sensual pleasures derived therefrom, therefore, deserve to be eschewed alike. On the other hand, one should eke out one's existence, singing the Sweet names of the Lord of innumerable auspicious traits.

vāḻntārkaḷ vāḻntatu mā maḻai mokkuḷiṉ māyntu māyntu,
āḻntār eṉṟu allāl, aṉṟu mutal iṉṟu aṟutiyā
vāḻntārkaḷ vāḻntē niṟpar eṉpatu illai; niṟkuṟil
āḻntu ār kaṭaṟpaḷḷi aṇṇal aṭiyavar āmiṉō. (IV-1-6)

Translation

Probing, since the beginning of time, into the lives of those
Said to have flourished in this world in yonder days,
You will find that they stayed not for ever
In that state but vanished like bubbles in rain water;
So then, if you seek life that truly lasts,
Become the vassal of the Sire Who on the deep ocean rests.

Note

The earthly opulence goes on dwindling with the passage of time; from the beginning of creation up till now, it has been seen that the so-called earthly magnates, said to have flourished in this world with all that show of affluence, did not last long. They had their cups of sorrow duly served, while the riches of the mundane world buried them deep into the earth and they could thus never get off the ground to which

they got themselves consigned. The Lord's lotus feet alone can lift us up to eternal existence in its true sense. The Lord reposing on the milk-ocean is concerting ways and means of reclaiming us and it behoves us to co-operate with Him and make His task easier.

ām iṉ cuvai avai āṟōṭu aṭicil uṇṭu ārntapiṉ,
tū meṉ moḻi maṭavār irakkap piṉṉum tuṟṟuvār,
īmiṉ emakku oru tuṟṟu eṉṟu itaṟuvar; ātaliṉ,
kōmiṉ tuḻāy muṭi āti am cōti kuṇaṅkaḷē, (IV-1-7)

Translation

Those who had a surfeit of hearty drinks
And delicious dishes, pampered by sweet-tongued damsels,
Will soon lose all that wealth and, at ruin's brink,
Go about begging for food, morsel by morsel;
Better sing and enjoy in a chorus the renown
Of the Lord resplendent with tuḷaci garland on His crown.

Note

This is yet another stanza wherein the Āḻvār brings out, in sharp contrast, the fleeting and the firm, the ephemeral and the eternal. The pompous participants in the pleasures of the world put up a poor show when their wealth is gone and health is lost, naturally forsaken by the sycophants who once paraded in their courts and pampered them. Recounting the great glory of the Lord and His auspicious traits, one can, however, enjoy the eternal bliss, with no ups and downs like its earthly counterpart, the mundane happiness.

kuṇam koḷ niṟai pukaḻ maṉṉar koṭaikkaṭaṉ pūṇṭiruntu,
iṇaṅki ulaku uṭaṉ ākkilum, āṅku avaṉai illār
maṇam koṇṭa pōkattu maṉṉiyum mīḷvarkaḷ; mīḷvu illai,
paṇam koḷ aravu-aṇaiyāṉ tirunāmam paṭimiṉō. (IV-1-8)

Translation

Even kings, good and bounteous, with a great name,
Who wealth immense do wield,
Will come to grief if they propitiate not the Lord Supreme;

Recite them, the holy names of the Lord on serpent-bed
And wealth eternal do earn.

Note

Even kings of flawless fame will get dislodged from their seat of distinction, if they do not turn their minds towards God in grateful acknowledgement of His gifts. But those who laud the Lord's glory and recite His holy names are bound to enjoy the perennial bliss of eternal service unto the Lord, even as Ādi-Śeṣa does. The Lord will also cling fast to such devotees even as He clings to Ādiśeṣa.

paṭi maṉṉu pal kalaṉ paṟṟōṭu aṟuttu, aimpulaṉ veṉṟu,
ceṭi maṉṉu kāyam ceṟṟārkaḷum, āṅku avaṉai illār
kuṭi maṉṉum iṉ cuvarkkam eytiyum mīḷvarkaḷ; mīḷvu illai,
koṭi maṉṉu puḷ uṭai aṇṇal kaḻalkaḷ kuṟukumiṉō. (IV-1-9)

Translation

Even they that do wealth hereditary renounce
And conquer the senses five, doing hard penance,
With aversion great for this body, gross and dense,
Will but reach the pleasant Svarga and be hurled thence
Back to Earth; better attain the feet of the Lord
Who has, on His banner, that bird (Garuḍa)
And enjoy the bliss that for ever lasts.

Note

In the preceding stanzas, the Āḻvār deprecated the earthly pleasures. And now, he points out that the 'Svarga', the fairy land known for its unmixed pleasures attained through rigorous penance, abjuring the wealth and bodily pleasures over here, is not hospitable enough to provide these men asylum for all time. They are literally hurled down to Earth at the end of the allotted tenure of their stay in Svarga (Bhagavad Gītā-IX 21). If only these practicants had sought the Lord's grace instead, they would have been better off, enjoying the bliss of eternal service unto Him in the same way as Garuḍa, the Lord's proximate attendant, does.

kuṟuka mīka uṇarvattoṭu nōkki, ellām viṭṭa
iṟukal iṟappu eṉṉum ñāṉikkum ap payaṉ illaiyēl,
ciṟuka niṉaivatu ōr pācam uṇṭām; piṉṉum, vīṭu illai,
maṟukal il īcaṉaip paṟṟi viṭāviṭil; vīṭu aktē. (IV-1-10)

Translation

Even the gnostic who, thro' many an austerity, strives
For mere emancipation from rebirth and remains shut unto service divine,
Shall be, by petty desires, impediments to his goal beset
Or shall in self-enjoyment be for ever lost;
Better seek, therefore, refuge in the immaculate Lord
And reap the bliss supreme that does for ever last.

Note

The Āḻvār exhorts people to give up striving after 'Kaivalya Mokṣa', even though it is everlasting, unlike the limited stay in Svarga and seek, instead, the Supreme bliss of eternal service unto the Lord, as enunciated in the opening stanza of this decad. The 'Kaivalya Niṣṭa' subjects himself to an extremely rigorous course of mental and physical discipline in his attempt to perceive the Soul within and hold an exclusive rapport with it. In the process, he studiously eschews all other values of life and it is indeed most unfortunate that this exclusiveness even goes as far as keeping him away from God-consciousness and God-love. Thus, devoid of Divine grace, these people run the risk of not attaining their cherished goal of self-realisation, getting tainted by some petty desires lurking in remote corner of their minds during the last moments of their lives, which will put them back into the vicious cycle of birth and death as in the case of Ādi-Bharata (Jaḍabharata) who got distracted by tender solicitude for his pet deer at the crucial moment.

aktē uyyap pukum āṟu eṉṟu kaṇṇaṉ kaḻalkaḷmēl
koy pūm poḻil cūḻ kurukūrc caṭakōpaṉ kuṟṟēval
cey kōlattu āyiram cīr toṭaip pāṭal ivai pattum
akkāmal kaṟpavar āḷ tuyar pōy uyyaṟpālarē. (IV-1-11)

Translation

Those that learn well these songs ten
Out of the thousand composed by Kurukūr Caṭakōpaṉ,
Chaste and elegant, stressing that salvation
Lies in adoring lord Tirunāraṇaṉ's feet and there alone,
Will from deep distress be relieved and salvation attain.

Notes

(i) The Āḻvār ends up this decad, just as he began it, by stressing the importance of taking refuge at Śrīman Nārāyaṇa's lotus feet which dispel our distress and elevate us unto Him.

(ii) *Chaste and elegant*: The chastity of Tiruvāymoḻi', as a composition, lies in the fact that it has been compiled by the Āḻvār in a spirit of Divine Service with supreme dedication. Again, 'Tiruvāymoḻi,' as the Dramiḍa Veda, does not lag behind its Counterpart, the Sanskrit Vedas, in elegance and literary embellishments. The former has all the facets and ingredients corresponding to those of the latter.

(iii) *Deep distress*: The dire distress resulting from hankering after material wealth, 'Kaivalya Mokṣa' etc; relief from distress would, in this context, mean abstinence from all else but exclusive devotion to the Lord.

Fourth Centum, Second Decad (IV-2)
(Pālaṉ āy, Eḻ ulaku uṇṭu)

Preamble

In the eighth decad of the third centum, the Āḻvār and his sense-organs intensely longed for the enjoyment of God, in a spirit of competitive exuberance. In the three succeeding decads, this God-hunger was temporarily displaced, partly by the Āḻvār's pre-occupation with his fellow-beings and partly by his joyous recounting of the various benefits conferred on him by the bounteous Lord. And now, in this decad, the Āḻvār's God-hunger has lifted up its

head once again, the recoiling, as it were, of the Āḻvār's advice to the worldlings on the Āḻvār himself. Well, this is precisely what happened when Vibhīṣaṇa advised Rāvaṇa. Vibhīṣaṇa's advice, as we all know, fell on deaf ears but, at the same time, it led to Vibhīṣaṇa himself getting into Śrī Rāma's camp. And then, take the case of Prahlāda. The little lad's advice to an unresponsive and uncompromising fiend of a father (Hiraṇya) only tended to enrich the former's God-love. The Āḻvār's God-love having been excited, he longs for the Lord's vision, as during His Avatāras, in the days gone-by. So deep is his longing that the frustration resulting from its non-fulfilment renders the Āḻvār insensate, like a female forsaken by her lover after their erstwhile union. The mother steps in, once again, to describe the critical condition of her daughter, the Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī.

It is worth recalling, in this context, how Bhīmasena prayed to Hanumān, when the former met the latter several thousands of years after Śrī Rāma had gone back to the Celestium, that Hanumān be pleased to exhibit the gigantic form he had assumed while flying across the ocean to get into Laṅkā. Well, Bhīmasena was not that ludicrous sort to ask for the impossible. Actually, he was well aware of Hanumān's great prowess and his ability to meet the demand in question. Likewise, the Āḻvār was also quite conscious of the Lord's capacity to take him through back periods, cutting across even the proverbially irretrievable past. This knowledge of the Āḻvār, coupled with his irrepressible longing to enjoy the Lord's past Avatāras, could very well form the background for this decad.

pālaṉ āy, ēḻ ulaku uṇṭu, parivu iṉṟi,
āliḷai aṉṉavacamceyyum aṇṇalār
tāḷ-iṇaimēl aṇi taṇ am tuḻāy eṉṟē
mālumāl-valviṉaiyēṉ maṭa valliyē. (IV-2-1)

Translation

Alas! this fell sinner's tender daughter, like unto a creeper young
Is madly in love with the Lord and keeps pining
For the tuḻaci garland, cool and nice, on His feet worn,
When He, as a babe, held in His stomach, the worlds seven,
With no effort, reposing on a fig-leaf thin.

Note

"It is amazing", the Mother exclaims, "that my daughter should pine, at this distance of time, for the tuḷaci garland worn on the Lord's feet when He contained, in His stomach, all the worlds and reposed, as a tender babe, on a fig-leaf, floating on the vast expanse of water. Had the Lord gulped down the worlds as an adult, it might not agitate my daughter's mind so much. She is indeed worried that He should have done it, as a mere babe, even as children are generally prone to gulp down the mouth whatever comes handy. And then, I can understand her mouth constantly uttering the words, 'tuḷaci, cool and lovely, at the feet of the Lord' confounded that she is with deep love but she longs to have it, right now. If a person comprehends as fire the lustre shed by a gem, should the heat of this imaginary fire be also felt? How strange is my daughter's stance indeed!"

valli cēr nuṉ iṭai-āycciyar-tammoṭum
kollaimai ceytu, kuravai piṇaintavar
nal aṭimēl aṇi nāṟu tuḷāy eṉṟē
collumāl-cūḻ viṉaiyāṭṭiyēṉ pāvaiyē. (IV-2-2)

Translation

Ha! the statuesque daughter of this sinner dire
Always pines for the tuḷaci fragrant, worn on the lovely feet
Of the Lord who (as Kṛṣṇa) did around Him gather
The thin-waisted shepherdesses and on them unleash
Many a wily prank and with them merrily danced.

Note

It was a glorious night, the night of nights, when the classical dance, known as 'Rāsa Krīda', in Sanskrit and 'Kuravai', in Tamil, took place in Vrindāvan. Śrī Kṛṣṇa, assuming several forms, enchanting beyond description, danced in between one Gopi and another, His hands being locked up with theirs. Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī now pines for the fragrant tuḷaci worn by the Lord on His feet at that time, being a legitimate aspirant, comparable to the Gopis in question. Perhaps, the gnostic mother had pointed out to the Nāyakī that her pining for the tuḷaci garland worn by the Lord during the great deluge as a measure of universal protection, in a remote past, was not merely out of date but also out of place.

pā iyal vēta nal mālai pala koṇṭu,
tēvarkaḷ mā muṉivar īṟaiñca niṉṟa
cēvaṭimēl aṇi cem poṉ tuḷāy eṉṟē
kūvumāl-kōḷ viṉaiyāṭṭiyēṉ kōtaiyē. (IV-2-3)

Translation

This dire sinner's daughter, with locks lovely,
Pines for the pretty tuḷaci, like red-gold, at the Lord's feet comely,
(That spanned the worlds), adored by Devas and Sages great,
Chanting the Vedas, set in metres appropriate,
Like unto many a garland exquisite.

Note

The Nāyakī covets the tuḷaci, worn at the feet of the Lord, when He spanned the Universe long, long ago and the great Sages and Devas worshipped Him with beautiful garlands, namely, the sweet metrical compositions of the Vedas. The Mother is indeed surprised that her lovely daughter of ravishing beauty, the garland coveted by the Lord Himself, should cove· yet another garland.

kōtu ila vaṇ pukaḻ koṇṭu, camayikaḷ
pētaṅkaḷ collip pitaṟṟum pirāṉ, paraṉ
pātaṅkaḷmēl aṇi paim poṉ tuḷāy eṉṟē
ōtumāl-ūḻviṉaiyēṉ taṭan tōḷiyē. (IV-2-4)

Translation

Ha! this terrific sinner's daughter, with shoulders fair,
Craves for the tuḷaci, pretty like Gold, fresh and pure,
That decorates the feet of the Supreme Lord in heaven,
Whose traits flawless are debated upon
By the votaries over there with great fascination.

Notes

(i) The debate by the distinguished denizens of Heaven arises from the fact that one section feels attracted by the Lord's transcendent glory (Paratva) while another is drawn towards His 'Saulabhya', simplicity galore. Each section adores the Lord from its own angle. A trait is said to be flawless only when the person who contemplates it is wholly immersed in it without being led on to any other trait. The Lord's traits are flawless in the sense that each one of them is of unlimited dimensions and one can get immersed in, rather, rivetted to it, for all time.

(ii) The mother having pointed out that the Lord's incarnate forms belonged to the irretrievable past, like the rivers, once in spate, having gone dry, the Nāyaki would be satisfied if she could at least get hold of the tuḷaci garland from the Lord, in His transcendental abode.

tōḷi cēr piṉṉaiporuṭṭu, erutu ēḻ taḻīik
kōḷiyār, kōvalaṉār, kuṭak kūttaṉār
tāḷ-iṇaimēl aṇi taṇ am tuḻāy eṉṟē
nāḷum nāḷ naikiṉṟatāl-eṉ-taṉ mātarē. (IV–2–5)

Translation

Alas! day by day, my daughter keeps withering down,
Pining for the tuḷaci, cool and lovely, on His feet worn
By Kōvalaṉ, the Pot-dancer, who pounced upon the bulls seven,
To win the hand of Piṉṉai, the pretty bride, with shoulders fine.

Note

Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī is said to be withering away, in contemplation of the tuḷaci worn by Kōvalaṉ (Gopāla Kṛṣṇa) when He tamed the seven unruly bulls to secure the hand of Nappiṉṉai, the charming niece of Queen Yaśodhā. If the gnostic mother could not get for the Nāyakī, the tuḷaci garland worn by the Lord in the heavenly abode, she would want to know why she cannot have the tuḷaci from the feet of Śrī Kṛṣṇa who encountered the seven unruly bulls for the sake of one like her.

mātar mā maṇmaṭantaiporuṭṭu, ēṉam āy,
āti am kālattu akal-iṭam kiṇṭavar
pātaṅkaḷmēl aṇi paim poṉ tuḻāy eṉṟē
ōtum māl eytinaḷ-eṉ-taṉ maṭantaiyē. (IV–2–6)

Translation

My young daughter stands entranced by the tuḷaci, superfine,
Which did the lovely feet of the Great Boar adorn,
Who the Earth pulled out in a distant past,
From deep waters to placate Mother Earth of charm exquisite.

Note

The Mother says that her daughter goes into raptures over the tuḷaci worn at the feet of the Lord who assumed even the form of a beast and reclaimed the earth from beneath the deep waters for the sake of just another lady, namely, Dame Earth.

maṭantaiyai, vaṇ kamalat tirumātiṉai,
taṭam koḷ tār mārpiṉil vaittavar tāḷiṉmēl
vaṭam koḷ pūm taṇ am tuḻāy malarkkē ivaḷ
maṭaṅkumāl, vāḷ-nutalīr!–eṉ maṭakkompē. (IV–2–7)

Translation

Ye, damsels with foreheads bright! here's my daughter,
Like unto the creeper young, madly after
The tuḷaci garland, cool and lovely, closely knit,
At the feet of the Lord who lodged on His broad chest,
With garland, bedecked (Lakṣmī), the lotus-born,
The lady, young and lovely (when He did the ocean churn).

Note

Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī's mind leaps back to the churning of the Milk-ocean, when Lakṣmī emerged and got herself lodged on the Lord's chest. Following the usual pattern, the Nāyakī is after the tuḷaci worn by the Lord on His feet at that time.

kompu pōl cītaiporuṭṭu, ilaṅkai nakar
ampu eri uyttavar tāḷ-iṇaimēl aṇi
vampu aviḻ taṉ am tuḷāy malarkkē ivaḷ
nampumāl-nāṉ itaṟku eṉ ceykēṉ, naṅkaimīr? (IV-2-8)

Translation

Ye, young ladies, what can I do for my daughter
Who does for the fragrant tuḷaci, cool and lovely, aspire,
Worn at the feet of Rāma whose arrows spat fire
On Laṅkā to reclaim Cītai, like unto the comely creeper?

Note

The creeper is but a part of the tree and Sītā, the lovely creeper is thus part of the tree, namely, Rāma (like unto the gem and its lustre, the Sun and its sheen).

naṅkaimīr! nīrum ōr peṇ peṟṟu nalkiṉir;
eṉṉaṉē collukēṉ-yāṉ peṟṟa ēḻaiyai?
caṅku eṉṉum; cakkaram eṉṉum; tuḷāy eṉṉum;
iṉṉaṉē collum irāp pakal-eṉ ceykēṉ? (IV-2-9)

Translation

Ye, ladies, you too have reared up daughters,
But what to say of mine, this odd thing of a daughter?
Day and night, she keeps mentioning the Lord's conch,
The discus and tuḷaci; what can I do for her, as such?

Note

Addressing her mates, the Mother points out the difference between their daughters and hers. Deeply engrossed with God-love, Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī's speech is halting; not being sufficiently articulate, she spells out, at long intervals, the words 'conch', 'discus' and 'tuḷaci'.

eṉ ceykēṉ?—eṉṉuṭaip pētai, eṉ kōmaḷam,
eṉ collum eṉ vacamum allaḷ; naṅkaimīr!
miṉ cey pūṇ mārpiṉaṉ kaṇṇaṉ kaḻal-tuḷāy
poṉ cey pūṇ meṉ mulaikku eṉṟu meliyumē. (IV-2-10

Translation

Ye, ladies, what shall I do with my daughter?
She listens not to me, being immature and tender,
Well beyond control, poor thing, she is getting thinner,
Wanting to decorate her fond but languishing breast
With tuḷaci worn on the feet of Kaṇṇaṉ on whose chest,
Broad and bedecked, the jewels gleam bright.

Note

The ladies, to whom the Mother complains, turn round and ask her whether she could not counsel her daughter suitably and keep her under restraint. The Mother regrets that her daughter has gone out of hand, being enthralled by the charming personality of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, bedecked with lustrous jewels. Unable to secure the tuḷaci, worn on His feet, with which Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī wants to decorate her emaciated but all the more attractive breast, she is thinning down and the Mother just does not know how to deal with a daughter like this, infatuated with God-love, too deep for words. The Mother cannot punish the daughter because she is not merely immature but much-too-tender to stand the punishment. Bringing the God-intoxicated daughter round to the commonplace standards through routine advice, is also out of the question.

meliyum nōy tīrkkum nam kaṇṇaṉ kaḻalkaḷmēl
mali pukaḻ vaṇ kurukūrc caṭakōpaṉ col
oli pukaḻ āyirattu ip pattum vallavar
mali pukaḻ vāṉavarkku āvar nal-kōvaiyē. (IV-2-11)

Translation

Those that can recite these songs ten
Out of the thousand glorious songs of Kurukūr Caṭakōpaṉ,
Of established fame, adoring the feet of Kaṇṇaṉ,
The cure certain for the wasting malady of separation from Him,
Will on a par be with the celestials in heaven, of great fame.

Note

This end-stanza spells out the benefit accruing to those who are conversant with the ten preceding stanzas. The scholars will enjoy parity with the 'Nitya Sūris', the Ever-free angels in heaven. As the Āḻvār who pined for the tuḻaci at the feet of the Lord all along now describes those very feet as the cure for the malady of separation from Him, it is clear that the Lord has again obliged the Āḻvār with His beaming presence and regaled him, even as Lord Kṛṣṇa regaled the Gopīs, after a spell of separation from them.

Fourth Centum—Third Decad (IV-3)
(Kōvai Vāyāḷ)

Preamble

This decad would appear to have been appreciated in three different ways by the 'Pūrvācāryas' (Preceptors of yore), as indicated below:

Notes

(i) According to Empār, the Lord did not, as such, fulfil the aspiration of the Āḻvār, as set out in the preceding decad, but focussed his attention on some of His auspicious traits enjoying which the Āḻvār remains oblivious of his erstwhile longing. This is like the baby crying for the Moon being appeased by a substitute, say, a Coconut.

(ii) Tirumalai Nampi would have it that the Āḻvār could be placated by a mere assurance from the Lord to fulfil his aspiration. According to this preceptor, the Lord would seem to have told the Āḻvār to his face that his aspiration would be duly met and this assurance was enough to make the Āḻvār forget his erstwhile misery and exult as in this decad.

(iii) Śrī Parāśara Bhaṭṭar does not seem to have been satisfied with such half-hearted compliance by the Lord. Time being at the beck and call of the Supreme Lord, He could

certainly meet the demand of the Āḻvār and regale him. It is a fully satisfied Āḻvār who, according to Bhaṭṭarya, gives expression to the resultant joy in this decad.

kōvai vāyāḷporuṭṭu, ērṟiṉ eruttam iṟuttāy! matiḷ ilaṅkaik
kōvai vīyac cilai kuṉittāy! kula nal yāṉai maruppu ocittāy!
pūvai vīyā nīr tūvip pōtāl vaṇaṅkēṉēlum, niṉ
pūvai vīyām mēṉikkup pūcum cāntu eṉ neñcamē. (IV-3-1)

Translation

Oh, Lord, You broke the hump of the bulls truly
And secured (Nappiṉṉai), the red-lipped beauty;
The king of Laṅkā, with ramparts high, you killed
With Your bow infallible and out you pulled
The tusk fine of that majestic elephant and slew it;
At these crucial moments, I served you not in manner fit,
With flowers fine and water pure and yet
My mind is the sandal paste fit for your lovely body of lily tint.

Notes

(i) The Āḻvār regrets that he wasn't keeping himself close to the Lord, when He tamed the unruly bulls for winning the hand of Nappiṉṉai, the charming bride, when he slew Rāvaṇa, the king of Laṅkā and killed Kuvalayāpīṭa, the high class elephant, set on Him by the treacherous Kamsa, by crushing its tusks. Had he (Āḻvār) been by the side of the Lord on those occasions, he could have tended Him well and relieved Him of the fatigue. Despite this lapse on his part, the Āḻvār wonders how the Lord looks upon his mind, with great delight, as if it was aromatic like high class sandal paste, fit for anointing His exquisite body.

(ii) Had the Āḻvār been by the side of Lord Kṛṣṇa when He pounced upon the unruly bulls, he could have cautioned Him that they were not bulls, as such, but demons in disguise, even as Lakṣmaṇa, pointed out to Śrī Rāma, that the deer, coveted by Sītā, was but a Rākṣasa in disguise.

(iii) There is no greater security for us than the Lord and yet, Rāvaṇa relied on his forts and moats, and Kamsa, on Kuvalayāpiṭa, the mighty tusker and the like and little wonder then, they all came to grief.

pūcum cāntu eṉ neñcamē; puṉaiyum kaṇṇi eṉatutaiya
vācakam cey mālaiyē; vāṉ paṭṭu āṭaiyum aktē;
tēcam āṉa aṇikalaṉum eṉ kaikūppuc ceykaiyē-
icaṉ, ñālam uṇṭu umiḻnta entai, ēka mūrttikkē. (IV-3-2)

Translation

My mind alone is the sandal paste eminently fit
For the supreme Lord of form unique
Who once did gulp the worlds and then spat them out;
The hymns by my tongue knit do His garlands make
And His silken robes as well; my salutation with joined palms
Decorates Him with many a jewel that gleams.

Note

The Āḻvār keeps meditating on the Lord's resplendent Form and His extraordinary love for him. All the three faculties of the Āḻvār–word, deed and thought–are extremely delectable to Him and loom large in His eyes. If the Āḻvār's mind is unto Him as aromatic as the sandal paste, his hymns are like unto the colourful garlands made of choice flowers of special fragrance. These very hymns of the Āḻvār also serve as the silken robes donned by the Lord with great pleasure. It is said that the apparel oft proclaims the man, and here, the Āḻvār's hymns, proclaiming the Lord's glory, serve as His apparel. And then, a single salutation made by the Āḻvār to the Lord by joining his palms, makes Him feel as though He has been fully decorated with jewels of extra-radiance. The Āḻvār is simply amazed at the astounding love of the Lord for him, as above.

ēka mūrtti iru mūrtti mūṉṟu mūrtti pala mūrtti
āki, aintu pūtam āy, iraṇṭu cuṭar āy, aruvu āki,
nākam ēṟi, naṭuk kaṭaluḷ tuyiṉṟa nārāyaṇaṉē! uṉ
ākam muṟṟum akattu aṭakki, āvi allal māyttatē. (IV-3-3)

Translation

You assumed a single form, then two, three and many,
The form you took of the senses five, the Sun and the Moon;
Formless, you did everywhere, as Internal Controller, pervade,
Repose you did, Oh, Nārāyaṇa, in mid-ocean on serpent-bed
And now your body and all it needs you have compressed
Right in my mind and thus feel fully relaxed.

Notes

(i) Here is a complete reversal of the picture, we saw in the last decad. The Āḻvār, sunk deep in dejection in that decad, is now very happy and proclaims that the Lord is also jubilant that His task has been well done, having taken the Āḻvār unto His fold, with great delight.

(ii) *Single Form*: This refers to the state of affairs prior to creation, when the Lord alone subsisted, containing within Himself, in a subtle state, all sentient and non-sentient beings; there was no scope then for differentiation, by name and form.

(iii) *Two forms*: Keen on creating the Sportive Universe, the Lord assumes the twin forms of 'Prakriti' and 'Mahān'

(iv) *Three Forms*: The triple 'ahaṅkāras' of Satva, Rājas and tāmas;

(v) *Many Forms*: The wonderful variety (i.e.) variegated forms of creation arising through inequalities among the three 'Guṇas', referred to in (4) above, the five sense-organs, the five elements etc.

māyttal eṇṇi, vāy mulai tanta māyap pēy uyir
māytta āya māyaṉē! vāmaṉaṉē! mātavā!
pūt taṇ mālai koṇṭu uṉṉaip pōtāl vaṇaṅkēṉēlum, niṉ
pūt taṇ mālai neṭu muṭikkup puṉaiyum kaṇṇi eṉatu uyirē. (IV-3-4)

Translation

My Lord, I served You not with garlands nice, when You killed
The strange demoness with poisoned breast, who suckled

You with intent to kill, when, as Vāmaṉaṉ, alms You did seek
From Bali, when You churned the ocean and as 'Mātavaṉ' took
Lakṣmī (Mother) on Your chest and yet, how is it, my life
You hold dear like the garland on Your crown high?

kaṇṇi eṉatu uyir; kātal kaṉakac cōti muṭi mutalā
eṇ il pal kalaṉkaḷum; ēlum āṭaiyum aktē;
naṇṇi mūvulakum naviṟṟum kīrttiyum aktē–
kaṇṇaṉ, em pirāṉ, emmāṉ, kāla cakkarattāṉukkē. (IV–3–5)

Translation

Unto Lord Kaṇṇaṉ, my benefactor great, holding the discus that 'Time' controls,
Delectable like the garland fine is my soul;
Deems He my love as His gleaming gold crown smart,
The jewels innumerable on His person, the silken robes appropriate
And the praises the three worlds heap on Him, their aggregate.

Notes

(i) The Āḻvār speaks of the Lord's adoration, strong and steadfast, of his soul and inordinate love for him. Having made the Āḻvār subsist in the real sense, the God-bound, rejuvenated life of the Āḻvār is as dear to Him as His famous garland 'Vaijayanti'. And what more? The Lord sees the Āḻvār's God-love as manifesting itself in His dazzling crown and the numerous jewels on His glowing person as well as the silken robes befitting Him. Again, He sees in the Āḻvār's devotion for Him, the aggregate of the praises heaped on Him by all the worlds.

(ii) *Controller of the wheel of Time*: Had it not been for the fact that the Lord is the Controller of the past, present and future, He could not have fulfilled the aspiration of the Āḻvār to have a glimpse of His past Avatāras, as set out in the last decad. As a matter of fact, the present decad is only the outpouring of the Āḻvār, in grateful acknowledgement of the Lord's extraordinary compliance.

(iii) Speaking about the Lord's acceptance of the Āḻvār's devotion as equivalent to the silken robes of His choice, here is an interesting anecdote:

One day, a Dhobi of the holy men of Śrīraṅgam brought the clothes, *laundered by him with loving care*, to be worn by the Idol of Lord Raṅganātha, to the great Ācarya, Rāmānuja first, for his approbation. Very pleased with the extra-fine work of the washerman, Śrī Rāmānuja led him straight to the Shrine and requested Lord Raṅganātha to have a look at the clothes, laundered so well, befitting His august Self. The Lord not only condescended to signify His loving approval but also declared, " For the loving service of this washerman, we now grant reprieve to that other washerman, who offended us during our Avatāra as Kṛṣṇa ". It may be recalled that, when Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma went to Mathurā, escorted by Akrūra, the dhobi, who washed the clothes of King Kamsa, was passing along with a donkey-load of laundered clothes of the royalty. He, however, declined to supply the clothes demanded of him by the Divine Brothers. For that offence, committed nearly four thousand years earlier, the Lord, in His Iconic Form as Raṅganātha, now granted him pardon because of the devotion of the washerman ushered into His presence by Śrī Rāmānuja. This is a case of vicarious reward, rather, expiation, betokening the Lord's adoration of the true devotion of His Subjects.

kāla cakkarattoṭu veṇcaṅkam kai ēntiṉāy!
ñālam muṟṟum uṇṭu umiḻnta nārāyaṇaṉē! eṉṟu eṉṟu,
ōlam iṭṭu nāṉ aḻaittāl oṉṟum vārāyākilum,
kōlam ām, eṉ ceṉṉikku uṉ kamalam aṉṉa kuraikaḻalē.
(IV–3–6)

Translation

Oh, Lord, holding In your hands exquisite,
The deadly discus and the conch white!
Oh, Nārāyaṇa, Who once ate all the worlds and then spat out!
Many a time, Your name I did call out;

Even if You don't respond at all, Your lotus feet,
With the victorious anklets on, shall my head decorate.

Note

In the preceding songs of this decad, the Lord's love for the Āḻvār was expatiated on, and now, the Āḻvār's reciprocal love for the Lord is being talked about. The Āḻvār avers that, even if the Lord studiously kept Himself away without responding to the repeated calls from him, His feet shall always adorn his head. It might be asked how the Lord's feet could adorn the Āḻvār's head, even when He is away. The Āḻvār subsists only on the sweet contemplation of the Lord's feet and when he says, as above, he is only dwelling in his thoughts.

kurai kaḻalkaḷ nīṭṭi, maṇ koṇṭa kōla vāmaṇā!
kurai kaḻal kaikūppuvārkaḷ kūṭa niṉṟa māyaṉē!
virai koḷ pūvum nīrum koṇṭu ēttamāṭṭēṉēlum, uṉ
urai koḷ cōtit tiru uruvam eṉṉatu āvi mēlatē. (IV-3-7)

Translation

Oh, Vāmaṇā, the handsome, Your resounding feet
Measured the worlds; they who but once salute
Those feet shall attain You, wondrous Sire,
Even if I worship You not with fragrant flowers
And water pure, Your resplendent Form, which beggars
Description, has made my Soul subsist, what a wonder!

Notes

(i) Despite the failure of the Āḻvār to worship, with flowers and water, the Lord, who is attainable by a single salutation with joined palms, the Āḻvār's soul has become the sole object of redemption by the Lord! The Āḻver simply thaws down at this boundless love and magnanimity of the Lord.

(ii) It was Vāmaṇa, transformed into Tṛvikrama, that measured the worlds, in just three strides, and yet, the

Āḻvār says, in this song, that Vāmaṇa did the job. This is because Vāmaṇa's bewitching beauty has such a strong hold on the Āḻvār.

eṉṉatu āvi mēlaiyāy! ēr koḷ ēḻ ulakamum
tuṉṉi muṟṟum āki niṉṟa cōti ñāṉa mūrttiyāy!
uṉṉatu eṉṉatu āviyum; eṉṉatu uṉṉatu āviyum;
iṉṉa vaṇṇamē niṉṟāy eṉṟu uraikka vallēṉē? (IV-3-8)

Translation

With love intense for my soul, you did, in full, pervade
The lovely worlds seven, all things are but your modes;
Radiant knowledge personified, you have my soul in you blended
And yours in me; how can I express this blending unique indeed?

Notes

(i) The original text lends itself to a two-fold interpretation, namely:

(*a*) Having secured my soul and thus made it subsist in the real sense, You are mighty pleased and are even inclined to feel that the purpose of Your immanence was achieved only when you got at me. This is like a whole town being besieged, for capturing just one person.

(*b*) Very keen on getting at me, You pervaded all things in their entirety, to ensure that I don't slip off, by any means.

(ii) It sounds rather odd that the Lord's Soul should be at the disposal of the Āḻvār. But the illustrious Yāmunācārya put it straight, by pointing out that there was nothing odd about this, because there is none to inhibit the Lord when, at His volition, He chooses to place Himself at the disposal of one of His subjects. When the individual Soul has to attain the Lord, the former's '*Karma*' could operate as the impediment, which has to be cut out, by His grace. In the reverse gear of the

Lord subordinating Himself to the Individual, there can be no obstruction whatsoever!

uraikka vallēṉ allēṉ; uṉ ulappu il kīrtti veḷḷattiṉ
karaikkaṇ eṉṟu celvaṉ, nāṉ? kātal maiyal ēṟiṉēṉ;
puraippu ilāta paramparaṉē! poy ilāta parañcuṭarē!
iraittu nalla mēṉmakkaḷ ētta, yāṉum ēttiṉēṉ. (IV-3-9)

Translation

Oh, Lord, complete and certain are your sovereignty and splendour
(Like unto your mingling with me); I can hardly express
Whether at all I can find the shore of the ocean endless
Of your connubial love; steeped in love, I do praise
You, a little, in the foot-steps of the Celestials, good and great,
Who your glory chant in tones that reverberate.

Note

The Āḻvār is well aware of his incompetence to sing the praise of the Lord of limitless glory; for the matter of that, the Celestials (Nitya Sūrīs) also fall far short, in this regard, their eminence notwithstanding. Even the Lord does not know the full extent of His glory. That being the case, the Āḻvār praises the Lord, in a state of ecstatic imbalance, lured by the roaring sound of chanting by the Celestials. After His mingling with the Āḻvār, well and truly, the Lord's sovereignty is also complete and His splendour real.

yāṉum ētti, ēḻ ulakum muṟṟum ētti, piṉṉaiyum
tāṉum ēttilum, taṉṉai ētta ētta eṅku eytum?
tēṉum pālum kaṉṉalum amutum ākit tittippa,
yāṉum em pirāṉaiyē ēttiṉēṉ, yāṉ uyvāṉē. (IV-3-10)

Translation

How can it ever exhaust His great glory
If I sang His praise, followed by all the worlds
And the Lord Himself? sweet unto me like honey,
Milk and candy, subsist do I, lauding my nectarean Lord.

Note

The Āḻvār, blest by the Lord with divine knowledge, full and complete, sings His praise, all the worlds without distinction of high and low, knowledgeable or otherwise, extol Him and then, the Omniscient, Omnipotent Lord Himself follows suit. And yet, all of them, put together cannot exhaust His glory, even if they sang His praise for ages, notwithstanding the involvement of the Lord Himself in this project, because His glory is limitless. The Āḻvār, deeply conscious of the felicities showered on him by the Lord, goes on singing the glory of the Lord, sweet unto him like all things delicious put together; otherwise he just cannot subsist.

uyvu upāyam maṟṟu iṉmai tēṟi, kaṇṇaṉ oṇ kaḻalkaḷmēl
ceyya tāmaraip paḻaṉat teṉṉaṉ kurukūrc caṭakōpaṉ
poy il pāṭal āyirattuḷ ivaiyum pattum vallārkaḷ
vaiyam maṉṉi vīṟṟiruntu viṇṇum āḷvar maṇṇūṭē. (IV-3-11)

Translation

Those well-versed in these songs ten,
Out of the veracious thousand composed by Caṭakōpaṉ
Of lovely Teṉ kurukūr, with lotus ponds and fields fertile,
Adoring the comely feet of Kaṇṇaṉ, for sheer survival,
Will for long flourish in this abode
And rule as well, right from here, the heavenly abode.

Notes

(i) The Āḻvār spoke about the love that subsists between him and his beloved, the Supreme Lord, in this decad, not because he could talk about it, in any appreciable measure, but for his mere survival.

(ii) Even as Brahma assured Sage Vālmīki, that not a word in the great Kāvya (Rāmāyaṇa) would be untrue, the Dramiḍa Veda (Tiruvāymoḻi) is of unquestionable veracity.

The truthfulness, claimed for the Sanskrit Vedas, equally holds good, in respect of the Tamil Veda.

(iii) Prior to his being brought into the Śrī Vaiṣṇava fold, the illustrious Preceptor, Nañcīyar (formerly known as Vedānti) was a staunch exponent of Advaita philosophy. Śrī Parāśara Bhaṭṭar conquered Vedānti in a religious disquisition, held at the latter's home town (Melkōt in Karnataka State) and thereafter, Vedānti, turned into the ascetic Nañcīyar, got himself inducted by Bhaṭṭārya into the rapturous realm of the 'Divya Prabhandas'. Little wonder, an intellectual giant that Nañcīyar was, he soon mastered the four thousand hymns of the Āḻvārs and imparted special lustre to the commentaries thereon. He longed to listen to the discourses at the feet of Bhaṭṭārya but the latter passed away at the tender age of 32. Whenever Nañcīyar recited this Song, he suffered the pangs of separation from the Master, all the more.

(iv) Verily, the chanters of this decad would be able to grant passport to heaven, to the people of their choice, right from here, betokening their sway over heaven.

Fourth Centum—Fourth Decad (IV-4)
(Maṇṇai iruntu tuḻāvi)

In the last decad, the Āḻvār rejoiced, over head and ears, in the sweet contemplation of the connubial love subsisting between him and the Lord. The Lord, however, apprehended that the Āḻvār might be swept off his feet and thrown overboard by such exuberance of joy, the overwhelming divine ecstasy jeopardising one's very existence. As already pointed out, at length, in the preamble to I-9, He is known to regulate the flow of His grace, consistent with the recipient's capacity for in-take and He, therefore, brought down the tempo, a little, just to stabilise the Āḻvār's God-enjoyment. Even this slight diminution, in his erstwhile enjoyment, upset the Āḻvār and reduced him to the plight of Śrī Rāma, during his separation from Sītā. Śrī Rāma is said to have gone about asking the

trees, the rivers (east-bound female rivers as well as the west-bound male rivers) and other inanimate objects, about the whereabouts of Sītā. And now, the Āḻvār, transformed once again as Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī, in a state of heavy depression, runs after the objects resembling her beloved Lord, in one respect or another, and things usually associated with Him and the disenchantment brought about, on nearer approach, makes her dumb-founded. This is like a man, dispossessed of his treasure, the money-bag, running about frantically, mistaking, as his own, the bags of others resembling his lost bag.

The Mother comes on the scene once again and relates the pitiable predicament of her daughter and the words she utters. The Mother also reveals her own sad plight, seeing her daughter in great distress. The merciful Lord, however, presents Himself before the Āḻvār, towards the end of this decad (tenth song) and puts the Āḻvār back on his feet.

maṇṇai iruntu tuḻāvi. vāmaṉaṉ maṇ itu eṉṉum;
viṇṇait toḻutu, avaṉ mēvu vaikuntam eṉṟu kai kāṭṭum;
kaṇṇai uḷnīr malka niṉṟu, kaṭalvaṇṇaṉ eṉṉum; aṉṉē! eṉ
peṇṇaip perumayal ceytāṟku eṉ ceykēṉ, pey vaḷaiyīrē?
(IV-4-1)

Translation

Ye, ladies, with bangles bedecked, thro' earth, her hands she runs
And exclaims, it is the one trodden upon by Vāmaṉaṉ,
The sky she worships with joined palms as Vaikuṇṭam,
Her Lord's transcendent abode, and points it to others as well;
Her mental anguish finds its outlet thro' tears torrential
And says she, her Lord is of oceanic hue;
Unto Him who has my daughter thus entranced, what to do?

Notes

(i) The Mother tells, as above, those who come and enquire of her about the condition of her daughter, Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī.

(ii) *Earth, trodden upon by Vāmaṉaṉ* This kind of glamour for the earth, recalling its association with Vāmana who trod upon it, long, long back, has a parallel in Sage

Viśvāmitra: When Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa accompanied the sage to help him through his yāga, they passed by a nice orchard. On being asked by Śrī Rāma whose it was, the sage replied that it was the Siddhāśrama, where the Lord, as Vāmana, once resided, which the sage was still clinging to fondly, enjoying the scent of the soil.

(iii) Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī, pointing to the sky, says that 'Vaikuṇṭa', the permanent abode of the Lord is over there. This has a parallel in Śloka 16 of chapter 160 of Vanaparva in Mahā Bhārata, where a few people are said to have had a glimpse of the Heaven, right from the hermitage of Ārṣtiṣeṇa, the Rāja ṛṣi.

Unable to visualise the actual setting in Heaven, tears come to Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī's eyes and musing on the Lord's blue complexion, she says her Lord is of oceanic hue. The mother just doesn't know how to deal with the situation, whether to ask her daughter to await His arrival patiently or to request Him to come quick and meet her daughter.

peyvaḷaik kaikaḷaik kūppi, pirāṉ kiṭakkum kaṭal eṉṉum;
ceyyatu ōr ñāyiṟṟaik kāṭṭi, cirītaraṉ mūrtti itu, eṉṉum;
naiyum kaṇṇīr malka niṉṟu, nāraṇaṉ eṉṉum; aṉṉē! eṉ
teyva uruvil-ciṟumāṉ ceykiṉṟatu oṉṟu aṟiyēṉē. (IV-4-2)

Translation

Ha! comprehend I can't the actions of my daughter,
Angelic little one, reverently joining her hands decked with bangles
And looking at the ocean as where reposes her great Benefactor;
Pointing to the Sun with red sheen peerless, she tells
That is just the complexion of Cirītaraṉ; flooded with tears
In her languishing eyes, the word Nāraṇaṉ, she always utters.

Note

It is because Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī keeps meditating on her Lord of oceanic hue that the bangles could be sustained on her wrists, despite her separation from her beloved. It is now night and nothing is visible. The pensive Nāyakī with joined palms, however, hears the roaring noise of the oceanic waves and instantly envisions her Lord of oceanic hue, with her mind's eye, and says, it is the place where her Lord reposes. It could also be that she was recalling Śrī Rāma languishing before the ocean, without food, in order to get at Sītā.

And now, the Sun has risen and there is the visible Sun, unlike the ocean which she could only muse upon the previous night, without actually seeing it. The Sun reminds the Nāyakī of the conjunction of the Lord and Lakṣmī, like unto the combination of the gem and its lustre. Did not Sītā tell Rāvaṇa that she was but the sheen of Rāma, the Sun and that she could not be separated from Śrī Rāma? Śrī Rāma also echoed the same sentiment, later on. The Nāyakī is too feeble to mouth the word 'Nārāyaṇaṉ', in full and merely mutters the incomplete word 'Nāraṇaṉ'.

aṟiyum centīyait taḻuvi, accutaṉ eṉṉum; mey vēvāḷ;
eṟiyum taṇ kāṟṟait taḻuvi, eṉṉuṭaik kōvintaṉ eṉṉum;
veṟi koḷ tuḻāy malar nāṟum viṉaiyuṭaiyāṭṭiyēṉ peṟṟa
ceṟi vaḷai muṉ kaic ciṟumāṉ ceykiṉṟatu eṉ kaṇṇukku oṉṟē?
(IV-4-3)

Translation

This fell-sinner's little daughter, whose wrists are with bangles packed,
Clasps the blistering flame red, saying it is Accutaṉ, her Lord
But remains unhurt; the chill wind that blows she does embrace,
Saying it is Kōvintaṉ, her Sire, and acquires the sweet fragrance
Of the tuḻaci on His person; many a thing like this do I witness!

Notes

(i) The flamboyance of the Lord's person is referred to, as a bundle of brilliance. And so, the Nāyakī embraces the red flame with the same avidity with which she would embrace the Lord and because of her sincerity, she does not get blistered, even as Prahlāda was not scalded by fire and remained unscathed.

(ii) The cool, southerly breeze is unto the Nāyakī, like Kṛṣṇa, back home in the evening after tending the cows, coming towards her for a sweet embrace. Locked in the Lord's embrace, in the form of the cool breeze, the Nāyakī acquires the sweet fragrance of the tuḷaci on the Lord's person. (It is well known that fire blisters the common man while even the cool, southerly breeze has a blistering effect on the lover during moments of separation from her beloved. From what the mother has seen of the Nāyakī, she does not fall in either category—inscrutable indeed are her ways.

oṉṟiya tiṅkaḷaik kāṭṭi, oḷi maṇi vaṇṇaṉē! eṉṉum;
niṉṟa kuṉṟattiṉai nōkki, neṭumālē, vā! eṉṟu kūvum;
naṉṟu peyyum maḻai kāṇil, nāraṇaṉ vantāṉ eṉṟu ālum;
eṉṟu iṉa maiyalkaḷ ceytāṉ-eṉṉuṭaik kōmaḷattaiyē? (IV-4-4)

Translation

Says my tender daughter, love-intoxicated, pointing to the full Moon bright,
"Ha! my lustrous Lord of sapphire hue,"; beckons she the mountain high,
Saying, "Come, oh, Neṭumāl,"; beholding the rain-clouds fine,
She exclaims, "Nāraṇaṉ has come." and dances with great delight.

Notes

The Moon is said to have emerged from the Lord's mind: The Moon is cool and exhilarating like the Lord and hence, Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī looks upon the Moon as the Lord Himself. The well-grown mountain, tall and majestic, reminds the Nāyakī of the tall Tṛvikrama, who measured the worlds. Nañcīyar puts it admirably that the Lord fights shy of coming to the Āḻvār straight, weighed down by a clogging sense of default and puts a cloak on His head. The green growth on the mountain-tops corresponds to this cloak and the Nāyakī now beckons the Lord, in the shape of the mountain, to come and shake off all reserve.

The water-laden cloud is taken to be the Lord Himself, and the Nāyakī dances with joy even as the peacock does, in rapturous delight, at the sight of the rain-cloud.

kōmaḷa vāṉ kaṉṟaip pulki, kōvintaṉ mēyttaṉa eṉṉum;
pōm iḷa nākattiṉ piṉ pōy, avaṉ kiṭakkai ītu eṉṉum;
ām aḷavu oṉṟum aṟiyēṉ: aruviṉaiyāṭṭiyēṉ peṟṟa
kōmaḷa valliyai māyōṉ māl ceytu ceykiṉṟa kūttē. (IV-4-5)

Translation

My daughter, like the tendril young, has a hearty hug
At the young calves hefty, saying these are the ones
Tended by Kōvintaṉ; she runs after the crawling cobra young,
Saying that it is her Lord's bed; what the wondrous Lord means
To do with her, I, the incurable sinner, know nothing.

Notes

(i) More than tending the cows, Śrī Kṛṣṇa was fond of looking after the calves, the young ones, unable to look after themselves. This only indicates the special care, bestowed by the Lord on the weaker subjects.

(ii) Least afraid of the poisonous cobra, Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī would run after it, with the alluring affinity that it is the Lord's bed. The Mother stands perplexed, not knowing to what lengths such things might go.

kūttar kuṭam eṭuttu āṭil, kōvintaṉ ām eṉā ōṭum;
vāytta kuḻal-ōcai kēṭkil, māyavaṉ eṉṟu maiyākkum;
āyccíyar veṇṇaikaḷ kāṇil, avaṉ uṇṭa veṇṇai ītu eṉṉum;
pēyccí mulai cuvaittāṟku eṉ peṇkoṭi ēṟiya pittē! (IV-4-6)

Translation

Whoever does the pot-dance, my creeper-like daughter
Takes him to be Kōvintaṉ and runs after;
The sweet sound of the flute, when she hears,
Thinks she of her wondrous (Kaṇṇaṉ) and goes into raptures;
The butter she beholds in shepherdesses' hands, she avers

Is the same as that He ate; ḥa! she is over head and ears
In love with Him that sucked (unto death) the breast of the demoness.

Note

No doubt, during the Lord's avatāra as Kṛṣṇa, He partook of the community life and excelled in pot-dance. But that was long, long ago. But any one doing this dance as a piece of public show for eking out his livelihood, is mistaken by Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī for Kṛṣṇa and she runs after the performer, despite the clarification furnished by the people around. The sweet strain from a wayfarer's flute electrifies the Nāyakī who sees in it Kṛṣṇa Himself, who was known to go round the Gopīs, playing on His enchanting Flute meaningful songs, meant to placate the frustrated ones among them, by vindicating His position. If a shepherdess brought butter for sale, the Nāyakī would look upon it as what remained after Kṛṣṇa had consumed. This extraordinary fascination for Kṛṣṇa, on the part of the Nāyakī, is said to be an expression of her gratitude for Him for having killed, as a mere babe, the treacherous Pūthanā, the imposter of a mother. The Nāyakī thinks that the Lord survived the ordeal, only for her sake.

ēṟiya pittiṉōṭu ellā ulakum kaṇṇaṉ paṭaippu eṉṉum;
niṟu cevvē iṭak kāṇil, neṭumāl aṭiyār eṉṟu ōṭum;
nāṟu tuḻāy malar kāṇil, nāraṇaṉ kaṇṇi itu eṉṉum;
tēṟiyum tēṟātum māyōṉ-tiṟattaṉaḷē it tiruvē. (IV–4–7)

Translation

My daughter, in the mould of Tirumakaḷ, knows naught
Besides the wondrous Lord, be her mind agitated
Or clear; well under the spell of God-love, she says,
"All the worlds are but Kaṇṇaṉ's creation."; she goes
After those who, on their foreheads, apply the ash
Vertically, as Neṭumāl's votaries; when she sees
A fragrant tuḻaci garland, " This is Nāraṇaṉ's. " she says.

Notes

(i) The world might find the Nāyakī excited, being out of the ordinary run, but she is absolutely clear, so far as God-head is concerned. Actually, she knows nothing else. Even in her present state, she is voicing forth effortlessly, the Vedic truths delved into, by the great 'Brahma-Jñānīs' like Sage Parāśara. This is like a Vedic scholar reciting the Vedas even during mental aberration.

(ii) The Āḻvār is well aware that ash is eschewed by the votaries of Lord Viṣṇu and yet the vertical application of the ash on their foreheads, by a few, caught in two minds, makes the Nāyakī look upon them also as Vaiṣṇavas (wearing the vertical caste-mark) and go after them. The word ' niṟu ', in the original text of this song, need not necessarily denote ' ash ' (bhasma); it could as well mean the dust off the feet of the devotees of Lord Viṣṇu, as indicated by the use of this very word in IV-6-6.

(iii) Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī is said to be an incarnation of Goddess Lakṣmī. Lakṣmī is coveted by the Lord while the Nāyakī covets the conjunction of them both.

tiru uṭai maṉṉaraik kāṇil, tirumālaik kaṇṭēṉē eṉṉum;
uru uṭai vaṇṇaṅkaḷ kāṇil, ulaku aḷantāṉ eṉṟu tuḷḷum;
karu uṭait tēvu ilkaḷ ellām kaṭalvaṇṇaṉ kōyilē eṉṉum;
veruvilum vīḻvilum ōvāḷ; kaṇṇaṉ kaḻalkaḷ virumpumē.
(IV–4–8)

Translation

On seeing the wealthy Kings (of the Earth), says my daughter,
She has seen ' Tirumāl '; nice things with gay colours,
She jumps at, seeing in them her Lord, who did measure
The worlds; any temple she sees, with idol inside, she adores
As the temple of her cloud-hued Lord; pines she for ever,
Kaṇṇaṉ's feet, be she amorous or in a state of fear.

Notes

(i) Beholding the earthly kings, the Nāyakī says she has seen her Lord. As the Śāstras put it down, none can become a King without the grace of Lord Viṣṇu. The king is, therefore, said to contain an element of Lord Viṣṇu.

(ii) The Nāyakī visualises Lord Tṛvikrama in all things gay and colourful, and any stone-image in any temple-like structure, she looks upon as the Iconic Form of Lord Viṣṇu and His temple respectively. As a matter of fact, salutation made to minor deities also reaches Him, as the Internal Controller of one and all. Indeed, the divine consciousness in her has developed to such an extent that she perceives Divinity in all external objects.

It is said that Saint Nāthamuni once saw a King mounting an elephant, by planting one foot on the head of a subordinate prince standing nearby, and exclaimed: "Well, this is how my universal Lord mounts His vehicle, Garuḍa, stepping on the heads of Brahmā, the demi-urge and others".

During those periods when she is steeped in God-love, the Nāyakī is said to be in an amorous state while, at other times, she is seized with fright, at the sight of the earthly relations around.

virumpip pakavaraik kāṇil, viyal-iṭam uṇṭāṉē! eṉṉum;
karum peru mēkaṅkaḷ kāṇil, kaṇṇaṉ eṉṟu ēṟap paṟakkum;
perum pula ā-nirai kāṇil, pirāṉ uḷaṉ eṉṟu piṉ cellum;
arum peṟal-peṇṇiṉai māyōṉ alaṟṟi, ayarppikkiṉṟāṉē. (IV–4-9)

Translation

This daughter of mine, difficult to attain, is made to cry out,
Mad with love for her wondrous Lord; if ascetics she met,
She would with devotion exclaim, "Oh, Saviour great,
Who did the sprawling worlds in your stomach sustain."
She would want to leap up to the dark-cloud, dense,
Saying, "Tis Kaṇṇaṉ, my Lord"; after cows, hefty and nice,
Run she would, hoping to meet her Lord, the Cow-herd divine.

Notes

(i) Indeed, Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī is a daughter, rare of attainment, who has enriched the world she lived in, with

her lofty thoughts and noble conduct, surcharged with God-love of a unique order.

(ii) Seeing the water-laden cloud, the Nāyakī felt that Lord Kṛṣṇa presented Himself before her and she would want to reach Him, high up there. Here is an anecdote to illustrate how devotees felt entranced by the rain-clouds, seeing their likeness to the Lord's complexion.

Tiruvāykulattāḻvār, a resident of Rājendra Cōḻaṉ, went to the fields during a rainy season to inspect the crops. As he approached the fields, he saw the clouds above, which instantly put into his mind the cloud-hued Lord Viṣṇu. In a fit of ecstasy, he fell down unconscious. One of the cultivators, standing nearby, gathered him up and escorted him to his house. The escort, however, blamed the inmates of the house for having allowed one of such saintly temperament to go out for field-inspection during the rainy season.

ayarkkum; cuṟṟum paṟṟi nōkki, akalavē nīḷ nōkkuk koḷḷum;
viyarkkum; maḻaikkaṇ tuḷumpa, vevvuyir koḷḷum; mey cōrum;
peyarttum kaṇṇā! eṉṟu pēcum; perumāṉē, vā! eṉṟu kūvum;
mayal-peruṅ kātal eṉ pētaikku eṉceykēṉ valviṉaiyēṉē?
(IV–4–10)

Translation

Love-mad, my daughter looks around many a time (for Kaṇṇaṉ)
And then, she looks far across, with eyes wide open,
Tears well up her eyes and (disappointed) she sweats and withers down,
Heaving a deep sigh; even so, Him she fondly beckons,
'Kaṇṇā, my Sire,'; what shall this sinner do for her, love-lorn?

Note

Unable to get at the Lord in the manner the Nāyakī attempted, namely, running after things bearing His likeness, the Nāyakī, stands dazed. However, in the certain hope that her beloved Kṛṣṇa will go to her, Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī looks around but not finding Him anywhere near at hand, she fancies, He must be on His way, having already left the celestium, bound for her. And, therefore, she strains her eyes to look

at Him, coming down from Heaven, and enjoy His majestic gait. But then, she sweats heavily, with disappointment and tears well up her eyes. Withering down, she breathes hot and yet, she couldn't resist calling out for Him, at the top of her voice, At this stage, due to the exhilaration of reciting the Lord's names, she fancies that He has come within sight of her mind's eye and lovingly welcomes Him, saying, "Come along, my Lord,"

valviṉai tirkkum kaṇṇaṉai vaṇ kurukūrc caṭakōpaṉ
col viṉaiyal coṉṉa pāṭal āyirattuḷ ivai pattum
nalviṉai eṉṟu kaṟpārkaḷ nalaṉiṭai vaikuntam naṇṇi,
tolviṉai tīra ellārum toḻutu eḻa viṟṟiruppārē. (IV-4-11)

Translation

Those that learn, with devotion great, these songs ten,
Out of the thousand skilfully composed by Caṭakōpaṉ,
Chief of fertile Kurukūr, adoring Kaṇṇaṉ, the Redeemer
Of sins, one and all, will of all their sins be cured
And attain the blissful heaven, revered by the Celestials over there.

Notes

(i) Unable to stand the sufferings of the Āḻvār any longer, the Lord came down post-haste and relieved the Āḻvār of his erstwhile distress. That is why the Āḻvār calls Him, the great Redeemer of all sins. Even if the parents give up their daughter, the husband who took her by the hand, will never give her up. The Lord's *paragata svīkāra*' (i.e.) wooing His devotee and taking him within His grip always endures unlike the mother who finds herself helpless and plays the role of an anxious on-looker.

(ii) Those that learn this decad, either engrossed in its sweetness or banking on its potentiality for good, will attain the blissful Heaven, where there is no risk of separation from the Lord (viśleṣa), and have a royal reception, at the hands of the exalted band of '*Nitya Sūris.*' (The ever-free, eternal angels).

Fourth Centum—Fifth Decad (IV-5)
(Viṟṟiruntu ēḻ ulakum)

Preamble

If the Āḻvār was seen in the last decad in a heavy state of depression, it was because the Lord intended it to be so. Even as hunger is the pre-requisite for consuming food, for God-enjoyment in its entirety, a consuming passion of the highest intensity, as seen in the climactic tenth decad of the tenth centum, is imperative. Meanwhile, what is happening is a course of Shock-treatment, working the Āḻvār up to the required pitch. By experiencing, alternately, the bliss of Divine presence and rapport and the cruel pangs of separation from Him, the Āḻvār's appetite for God-enjoyment is whetted and his divine love and wisdom enriched all the time. If the Lord had stayed away from the Āḻvār altogether without obliging him with His vision, now and then, both the Lord and the world would have lost him. Apart from the afore-mentioned technique adopted by the Lord to enrich and intensify the Āḻvār's God-love, his continued stay in this abode has enriched the world through his hymns of unparalleled excellence, a rich fare for the devotees revelling in sweet contemplation of the Lord's auspicious traits and wondrous deeds. This is yet another purpose of the Lord in lengthening the Āḻvār's stay in this abode. And so, we see in this decad the very antithesis of the Āḻvār's harrowing experience in the last decad; his joy knows no bounds and leads him on to exclaim, "Could there be any want for me hereafter?", "Is there any one equal to me in all the world?" and so on. The structure of this decad suggests that the Āḻvār is right at the peak of divine bliss and, in the opinion of Nañcīyar, this could as well have been the very last decad of this grand hymnal.

Unlike the spurious objects which misled the Āḻvār in the last decad, he now visualises the Lord's cosmic wealth in all its facts. The Lord seems to call upon the Alvar to sing His glory to his heart's fill, adding that His cosmic wealth can acquire special lustre only through his laudation. Accordingly, the Āḻvār sings, with cymbals in hand, and goes into raptures.

viṟṟiruntu ēḻ ulakum taṉikkōl cella, vīvu il cīr
āṟṟal mikku āḷum ammāṉai, vem mā piḷantāṉ-taṉṉai,
pōṟṟi eṉṟē kaikaḷ ārat toḻutu, col-mālaikaḷ
ēṟṟa nōṟṟēṟku iṉi eṉṉa kuṟai eḻumaiyumē? (IV-5-1)

Translation

Could there be any want for me for generations,
Blest that I am to prostrate lustily, in benedictive adoration
And offer besides hymnal garlands appropriate
Unto the Lord, who the fierce horse-shaped fiend's mouth smote
The repository of auspicious attributes endless, seated in heaven,
Holding sway unique over all he worlds with great serenity?

Note

Being in the happy position of lauding the Master of the entire universe and envisioning, right from here, the heavenly splendour, the Āḻvār feels he is above wants of any kind. For instance, in the last decad, with joined palms, the Nāyakī pointed to the mere sky as the heaven and now the void is more than filled, those hands being lustily fed by repeated salutation of the Lord in all His splendour. Supreme Sovereign though, the Lord is not a despot. He rules the worlds with quiet dignity and is exceedingly generous even as Śrī Rāma, the Lord in His incarnate Form, was at the disposal of the subjects.

maiya kaṇṇāḷ, malar mēl uṟaivāḷ uṟai mārpiṉaṉ,
ceyya kōlat taṭaṅ kaṇṇaṉ, viṇṇōr perumāṉ-taṉṉai,
moyya collāl icaimālaikaḷ ētti, uḷḷappeṟṟēṉ-
veyya nōykaḷ muḻutum viyaṉ ñālattu vīyavē. (IV-5-2)

Translation

Blest am I, while still in this sprawling land,
To contemplate and laud thro' hymnal garlands,
Well set, the Lord of Celestials, with large eyes,
Red and lovely, on whose chest always stays

Lakṣmī, the lotus-born with collyrium in her eyes, well set
And get all dire ills and evils rooted out.

Notes

(i) It is lakṣmī, the Goddess of plenty and riches, who adds lustre to the Lord's glory by making His chest, her permanent abode. This glorious conjunction, which the Āḻvār praises, cures all ills and evils. If the Divine Mother looked at the Lord full in the face just once, the latter would feel exhilarated, cool and pleasant, as at the end of a heavy downpour. It is indeed a matter of reciprocity that Lakṣmī's eyes are dark and the Lord's eyes are red, the red complexion of the former having got transplanted in the eyes of the latter and the latter's dark complexion having likewise been transposed, when they gazed at each other.

(ii) It is significant that there is no mention in the text, as to whose ills have been rooted out by the Āḻvār's hymns. Evidently, it is intended to be of universal application and not parochial, benefiting the Āḻvār only, like the poor shade, thin and small, cast by the palmyrah tree.

vīvu il iṉpam mika ellai nikaḻnta nam accutaṉ,
vīvu il cīraṉ, malark kaṇṇaṉ, viṇṇōr perumāṉ-taṉṉai,
vīvu il kālam icaimālaikaḷ ētti, mēvappeṟṟēṉ;
vīvu il iṉpam mika ellai nikaḻntaṉaṉ mēviyē. (IV-5-3)

Translation

Dwell do I at the very acme of bliss perennial,
Having attained Accutan, my Lord, Chief of Celestials,
Of limitless glory and eternal bliss, with red-lotus eyes,
By incessant praise thro' hymns mellifluous.

Notes

(i) The bliss that the Āḻvār experiences, as a result of singing Tiruvāymoḻi, is not merely unlimited but also supreme. Unlike the Veda Puruṣa, who attempted the impossible in trying to gauge the extent of the Lord's bliss and had

to acknowledge defeat, the Āḻvār has, right from the beginning, been declaring that the Lord is an inexhaustible fountain of bliss. And now, he finds that the bliss derived by him by singing the Lord's praise through his scintillating hymns is also endless and supreme, there being nothing higher than this.

(ii) The tell-tale lotus eyes of the Lord proclaim His Sovereignty over all the worlds. It is not as if there is none to enjoy the Lord's charming eyes, like unto moon-shine wasted over the depopulated jungle, as we are likely to conclude, seeing the men over here turning their faces against Him; the whole lot of Celestials, the denizens in the yonder heaven, stand rivetted to these eyes, enthralled by their magic spell.

mēvi niṉṟu toḻuvār viṉai pōka mēvum pirāṉ,
tūvi am puḷ uṭaiyāṉ, aṭal āḻi ammāṉ-taṉṉai,
nā iyalāl icaimālaikaḷ ētti, naṇṇap peṟṟēṉ;
āvi eṉ āviyai yāṉ aṟiyēṉ-ceyta āṟṟaiyē. (IV-5-4)

Translation

I know not how the Lord, inside my soul,
Transformed it so as to sing His glory thro' hymns tuneful;
The Supreme Benefactor that He is, He does mingle
With those in Him absorbed and their sins destroys, one and all;
Garuḍa, the bird with lovely plumes, is His mount
And He holds in His hands, the discus valiant.

Notes

(i) The Lord gives Himself to those who long for Him exclusively, cutting out all other desires. All other desires gone, the sins also vanish. Oh, what a wonder, the Lord of the Eternal Heroes lavishes His bounty on a worldling like the Āḻvār, and the latter, a mere speck enjoys the bliss and beatitude, on a par with the infinite Lord, if not more!

(ii) The hymns come off effortlessly; the Āḻvār has only to set his tongue in motion, and there we have the mellifluous songs, sending the listeners, in all ages and climes, into raptures.

āṟṟa nalla vakai kāṭṭum ammāṉai, amarar-tam
ēṟṟai, ellāp poruḷum virittāṉai, emmāṉ-taṉṉai,
māṟṟa mālai puṉaintu ētti, nāḷum makiḻvu eytiṉēṉ–
kāṟṟiṉ muṉṉam kaṭuki viṉai nōykaḷ kariyavē. (IV-5-5)

Translation

Singing the praise of my Lord, Chief of Celestials,
Who does unto His devotees, by stages, reveal
The wholesome path of progress and knowledge sound impart,
Thro' hymnal garlands that do dense ills and evils cut out,
Moving faster than wind, I feel for ever jubilant.

Notes

(i) That the Lord duly regulates the influx of His grace has been brought out at length, in the preamble to I-9, quoting the relevant aphorism of 'Ācārya-Hṛdayam, which elucidates the theme admirably.

(ii) *The great truths*: In Bhagavad Gītā Lord Kṛṣṇa imparted to the world at large, through Arjuna, a volume of spiritual-knowledge—the distinction between the Supreme Lord and the Individual Soul (Jīva), the difference between the 'Jīva' and the non-sentient matter, immortality of the Soul, the Lord, as the Supreme Ordainer of all beings and things, controlling motion as well as rest, being easily attainable by devotees but difficult of attainment by others, differentiation between the Divine and the Devilish, equality in the eyes of the Lord, irrespective of caste, conduct and erudition, the path of loving surrender to His redemptive grace and all that.

(iii) All these benefits lavished by a loving Lord the Āḻvār could hardly repay, and hence he started lauding His great glory, which laudation assumed the form of

'Tiruvāymoḻi'. Result: The miseries and the acts giving rise to them have all been expelled expeditiously.

kariya mēṉimicai veḷiya nīṟu ciṟitē iṭum
periya kōlat taṭaṅkaṇṇaṉ, viṇṇōr perumāṉ-taṉṉai,
uriya collāl icaimālaikaḷ ētti uḷḷapperṟēṟku
ariyatu uṇṭō-eṉakku iṉṟu toṭṭum iṉi eṉṟumē? (IV-5-6)

Translation

Could there be anything scarce for me, now and beyond,
Blest that I am to praise thro' hymnal garlands,
In diction appropriate, the Chief of Celestials, my Lord
Whose large eyes lovely are with collyrium gently smeared?

Notes

(i) To a question put by the Lord to the Āḻvār what he needs, pat goes the reply from him, saturated with divine bliss, that there is scarcely a thing he hasn't got already and there would be nothing beyond attainment in the days to come. This depicts the mental state of the divine bard, in the realm of ecstasy, born of singing 'Tiruvāymoḻi', which stands on a pedestal of its own; It contains nothing but the praise of 'Tirumāl' (Lord Viṣṇu), in choice diction, true to the Āḻvār's resolve in 'Tiruviruttam', the first of his four works. Indeed, he who is inspired by God Himself, becomes the most worthy instrument to praise Him; he becomes the Lord's own poet. In his Rāmāyaṇa, Śri Vālmiki introduced quite a few extraneous anecdotes, such as the genesis of Gaṅga, birth of Kārthikeya and so on. Sage Vyāsa's Mahābhārata also turned out to be a war-memoir, with a bewildering maze of episodes, instead of telling exclusively, the story of Nārāyaṇa, as the author had intended at the outset. Herein lies the superior merit of Tiruvāymoḻi.

(ii) The bewitching eyes of the Lord would certainly need no further beauty-aids and yet, there is the ceremonial application of collyrium.

eṉṟum oṉṟu āki, ottārum mikkārkaḷum taṉ-taṉakku
iṉṟi niṉṟāṉai, ellā ulakum uṭaiyāṉ-taṉṉai,
kuṉṟam oṉṟāl maḻai kātta pirāṉai, col-mālaikaḷ
naṉṟu cūṭṭum viti eytiṉam; eṉṉa kuṟai namakkē? (IV-5-7)

Translation

Blest that we are to offer garlands of hymns
Unto the Benefactor great, who repelled the rains,
Holding the mount aloft, with none above or equal to Him,
Sovereign master of all the worlds, who constant remains
For ever, could there for us be any want?

Notes

(i) In the peceding song, the Āḻvār declared that he is free from wants of any kind and shall be above wants in the days to come as well. This might sound boastful but such a stance on his part is attributable to his authorship of the marvellous hymns, the Tiruvāymoḻi, which again is due to the Lord's grace, a fact emphasised in this song.

(ii) The Lord is constant and unchanging, whatever be His modes. In all His five manifestations, of 'Para', Vyūha', 'Vibhava', 'Antaryāmi' and 'Arcā' the Lord has none above or equal to Him. Even so, it is in His Incarnate (Vibhava) Forms, that He excels. In fact, He excels in His trait of 'Āśṛtapāratantṛa' (subservience to His devotees) for which His incarnations afford the maximum scope and there is hardly any equal for Him, in this respect.

namakkum pūviṉ micai naṅkaikkum iṉpaṉai, ñālattār
tamakkum vāṉattavarkkum perumāṉai, taṇ-tāmarai
cumakkum pātap perumāṉai, colmālaikaḷ collumāṟu
amaikka valleṟku iṉi yāvar nikar-akal vāṉattē? (IV-5-8)

Translation

Is there any one, even in the spacious heaven, equal to me
Gifted with the capacity to compose hymns,
Adoring the Lord, dear alike to us and the lotus-born (Lakṣmī)

Sovereign Master of those in heaven and all other realms,
Whose lovely feet the cool lotus bears?

Notes

(i) Seeing the Lord's overwhelming love for him, the Āḷvār feels tempted to declare that there is none equal to him, the Lord's poet, even in Heaven. The Lord's love for His devotees is even greater than that borne by Him for Lakṣmi, His consort, as could be seen from the fact that we the devotees, are mentioned first, in the text of this song, Lakṣmī comes next. This is further elucidated in aphorism 122 of Ācarya Hṛdayam. This fact is also reinforced by an episode in Rāmāyaṇa. Standing on a mountain top overlooking Laṅkā, Sugrīva saw, for the first time, Rāvaṇa, on another hill-top, opposite. Swayed by the first impulse, Sugrīva leapt across and toppled down the crown of Rāvaṇa. Śri Rāma who witnessed that, gently reprimanded the Monkey-King, on his return, saying "what you have done is indeed something not expected of you. If Rāvaṇa had harmed you or humiliated you in any manner what use is there for me in reclaiming Sītā thereafter?" This clearly shows that Śri Rāma's concern for Sugriva was even greater than that for Sītā. Sītā would be of no consequence to Śri Rāma, once Sugrīva's honour was compromised.

(ii) As already stated in III-1-1, the Lord's feet stand poised on a lotus base. And here, the lotus is said to carry the Lord's feet. This is because the Lord's feet score over the lotus, in all respects-chillness, fragrance and tint. The lotus thus stands subjugated and carries its victor, the Lord's feet.

(iii) The Āḷvār's capacity to sing hymns is commendable, not because of his excellence as a poet, but because he could steady himself and sing, when called upon by the Lord to sing His praise, instead of thawing down in ecstasy. The Āḷvār's poetic excellence is not emphasised here; actually, in the Seventh centum, ninth decad, the Āḷvār says that it is the Lord who sings His own glory, keeping the Āḷvār as but His mouthpiece.

vāṉattum vāṉattuḷ umparum maṇṇuḷḷum maṇṇiṉkīḻt
tāṉattum eṇ-ticaiyum tavirātu niṉṟāṉ-taṉṉai,
kūṉal caṅkat taṭakkaiyavaṉai, kuṭam āṭiyai,
vāṉak kōṉai, kavi colla vallēṟku iṉi māṟuuṇṭē? (IV-5-9

Translation

Is there a poet on a par with me,
Singing the glory of the Lord, pervading everywhere,
Top, middle and bottom, all things, all over,
Holding in His hand hefty the spiral conch lovely,
The pot-dancer entrancing, Chief of the Celestials?

Notes

(i) The Āḷvār is the peerless poet, singing the Lord's glory embracing all His five aspects of 'Para' (transcendent), Vyūha (Operative), Vibhava (Incarnate), 'Antaryāmi' (Internal Controller) and 'Arca' (Iconic) Forms. The 'Nityas' (Eternal Heroes) and 'Muktas' (Released Souls), in Heaven, confine themselves to the transcendent glory of the Lord; Sages like Parāśara and Vyāsa recount only Lord Kṛṣṇa's glory even as Sage Vālmīki stands rivetted to Śri Rāma's. Sages Sanaka, Sanandana and others of that group sing the praise of the Lord as the Internal Controller. Thus Nammāḷvār, stands out as the only poet covering all the aspects of the Lord. It is also noteworthy that the Āḷvār repeatedly refers to the Lord's inmanence, full and complete, setting at naught the controversial view held by some that the Lord's pervasion is only partial and not complete.

(ii) '*Spiral conch*' stands for all the Lord's effulgent weapons, like discus, mace etc, even as 'Pot-dancing' stands for all the other activities of Lord Kṛṣṇa.

uṇṭum umiḻntum kaṭantum iṭantum kiṭantum niṉṟum,
koṇṭa kōlattoṭu vīṟṟiruntum, maṇam kūṭiyum,
kaṇṭa āṟṟāl taṉatē ulaku eṉa niṉṟāṉ-taṉṉai
vaṇ-tamiḻ nūṟka nōṟṟēṉ-aṭiyārkku iṉpa māriyē. (IV-5-10)

Translation

Joy do I rain on devotees thro' Tamil hymns fine,
I have the fortune to compose, adoring Him, who, from time to time,
Ate, spat, spanned and pulled out the worlds,
Who (as Rāma) lay (on sea-front) and (victorious) stood
(on the battlefield) and then sat for long, on the throne,
Acts which, on the fact, proclaim Him as Sovereign Supreme.

Notes

(i) The Āḻvār feels doubly blessed, in that he not only renders service unto the Lord, by word of mouth, (Vācika Kaiṅkarya) but also regales His devotees, through his hymns. The Lord's wondrous deeds and marvellous achievements, the Āḻvār recounts rapidly but with great ease. The Lord sustained, in His stomach, all the worlds, for the duration of the deluge and then let them out; He measured the worlds in three strides and on another occasion, retrieved the Earth from the ocean; He prostrated in front of the Indian ocean, invoking the help of the king of the ocean to bund it and cross over to Laṅkā and stood victorious, after Rāvaṇa was slain, granting audience to the Celestials, gathered in the outer space. After His return from exile Śrī Rāma ruled this land for eleven thousand years and thus graced the earth, rather held Mother Earth in His embrace. All these deeds of the Lord clearly establish His Sovereignty over the entire Universe, even as we recognise the earthly owners of lands from their various dealings, connected with the lands.

(ii) The Āḻvār is the joyous cloud, unleashing the rain of joy upon the Lord's devotees through Tiruvāymoḻi.

māri māṟāta taṇ am malai vēṅkaṭattu aṇṇalai
vāri māṟāta paim pūm poḻil cūḻ kurukūr nakark
kāri maṟaṉ caṭakōpaṉ col āyirattu iṉ pattāl
vēri māṟāta pūmēl iruppāḷ viṉai tīrkkumē. (IV-5-11)

Translation

Lakṣmī, the lotus-born, of perpetual fragrance, will help those that learn
These songs ten, out of the thousand composed by Caṭakōpaṉ,
Of Kurukūr, with perennial water and big gardens,
Full of flowers lovely, lauding the Lord at Vēṅkaṭam, the mountain
Cool and lovely, with continual rain, to get rid of all sins.

Notes

(i) There is no mention in any of the ten preceding songs, about the Lord enshrined in Tiruvēṅkaṭam, and yet, in this end-song, the Lord, in His iconic Form, has been referred to. This only shows that the emphasis rests on 'Arca' throughout 'Tiruvāymoḻi'. In the eighth stanza of this decad, the amazing extent of God's condescending love, giving precedence to the worldlings over even the Divine Mother, was alluded to. The Lord at Tiruvēṅkaṭam is the very personification of such condescending love, and He has, therefore, been referred to in this end-stanza. Continual rains in Tiruvēṅkaṭam ensure the abundance of water for all time in Kurukūr (Tirunakarī), the birth place of the Āḻvār, and because of this plentiful supply of water, the fragrance of the lotus-flower on which Lakṣmī, the Divine Mother is seated, is undiminishing. (Grand poetic imagery indeed!)

(ii) The text, as in the original, is misconstrued by some as placing the Divine Mother on a par with the Lord, in regard to the grant of 'Mokṣa'. Hers is only a recommendatory role and she can only be instrumental in our attaining Mokṣa at the hands of the Lord whose indivisible and inalienable prerogative is '*Mokṣa pradatva* (grant of Mokṣa). The following is the elucidation

of Śrīman Nigamānta Deśika, in his commentary on Saint Yāmuna's Catuś Ślokī' in regard to this point. "It is the sole prerogative of the Lord to reward or punish the subjects, in the light of their 'Karma', the good and bad deeds. The Merciful Mother, however, makes admirable use of her position and privilege and gets the reward magnified and the punishment minimised through her good offices."

The chanters of this decad are thus quite safe under the apron of the Divine Mother, the sure deliverer of the goods.

Fourth Centum—Sixth Decad (IV-6)
Tírppārai yām iṉi

Preamble:

In the last decad, the Āḻvār was seen at the acme of divine bliss, bubbling with joy and fully satisfied. The Lord has, however, since withdrawn Himself from the Āḻvār's mental vision and he is now consigned to the bottom-most depths of dejection, transformed once again as a 'Nāyakī', unable to speak out her woe. It is her mate that speaks, in this decad. Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī is thinning down alarmingly, in her present state of extreme desolation. The elderly women around who notice this with great concern, seek the help of the professional sooth-sayer (a female gipsy) for divining the cause of the Nayaki's malady and suggesting the remedies therefor. On being told by the gipsy that the Nāyakī is under the spell of a minor (inferior) deity, these women proceed to propitiate that deity with the customary offerings of meat, liquor etc, as advised by the concerned priest. This only aggravates the mental agony of the Nāyakī and, at this stage, her mate, who knows the real cause of the Nāyakī's malady, is critical of the steps taken by the women-folk and vehemently condemns them. Thus, this decad brings out the Āḻvār's singular devotion to Lord Viṣṇu and his total abhorrence, rather intolerance of anything which smacks of allegiance to the minor deities.

It is indeed puzzling that such a traumatic experience should at all overtake the Āḻvār, just after what we had seen of him in the

last decad. If one searches for any link between these two consecutive decads and attempts to explain the violent fluctuations in the Āḻvār's fortunes, lack of coherence seems to be the only coherence, as Empār would put it, 'asaṅgathireva saṅgathiḥ'. Of course, 'asaṅgathi' could mean either lack of coherence or disunion (i.e.) Separation from the Lord (viśleṣa). As a matter of fact, the vicissitudes in the mystic experiences of the Āḻvār, alternating between the satiate and disconsolate states of mind, constitute the chief feature of 'Tiruvāymoḻi'. The Lord's purpose in bringing about such contrasting situations has already been elucidated, time and again.

tīrppārai yām iṉi eṉṉaṉam nāṭutum, aṉṉaimīr!-
ōrppāl iv oḷ-nutal uṟṟa nal nōy itu tēṟiṉōm;
pōrppāku tāṉ ceytu, aṉṟu aivarai velvitta māyappōrt
tērppākaṉārkku ivaḷ cintai tuḻāyt ticaikkiṉṟatē? (IV-6-1)

Translation

Ye, Elders, where shall we seek hence, the one that can cure
The malady of this young one, with forehead bright?
A delightful sickness of Spirit 'tis, I am sure,
She her mind has lost in Him that drove the chariot
In the wondrous battle and victory for the (Pāṇḍavas) five did secure.

Note

Face is the index of the mind. The agony of those killed by arrows or drowned in water is writ large on their faces. The unique sickness of spiritual character, the Nāyakī is suffering from, is reflected on her forehead The glow on her forehead helps to diagnose her malady as one that can be cured only by the Lord who inducted it, by stealing away her heart. Far from finding a cure for this, it is but meet that every one should aspire to acquire this kind of sickness and develop it. The Nāyakī felt entranced by the Lord's overwhelming love for His devotees, doing all odd jobs, such as driving their chariots, running errands on their behalf and so on. The present malady is the result of such an infatuation. Actually, this reflects the mood of all the

Āḻvārs, steeped in God-love, in sharp contrast with Ṛṣis, noted for clarity of mind, unperturbed by the sentimental God-love, God-hunger and things of that sort.

ticaikkiṉṟatē ivaḷ nōy; itu mikka perun teyvam;
icaippu iṉṟi nīr aṇaṅku āṭum iḷan teyvam aṉṟu itu;
ticaippu iṉṟiyē caṅku cakkaram eṉṟu ivaḷ kēṭka, nīr
icaikkiṟṟirākil, naṉṟē il peṟum; itu kāṇmiṉē. (IV–6–2)

Translation

Ye, mothers, confounded, do not go the wrong way and propitiate
The minor deity, You should know it is inappropriate;
This young lady's sickness is induced by the Supreme Lord.
Better utter the words' conch' and 'discus', so as to be heard
By her and you will then see it does her real good.

Notes

(i) The mate clarifies to the bewildered womenfolk, going the wrong way by propitiating the inferior deity, that the Nāyakī is not under the spell of any but the Supreme Lord and the cure for her malady, therefore, lies in their singing His glory, in a chorus, within her hearing. In fact, nothing but this will enter the Nāyakī's ears.

(ii) Here is an anecdote. One Āyccimakaṉ, a pious non-brahmin was sick and lying unconscious. As he was a great devotee of Lord Raṅganātha, Śrī Parāśara Bhaṭṭar went to see him and whispered into his ears, " Lord Raṅganātha (Aḻakiya Maṇavāḷa Perumāḷ) is the sole refuge ". This at once brought the patient back to his senses and he went on repeating these words, till the end.

(iii) There is yet another anecdote to drive home the fact that minor deities dare not approach the devotees of Lord Mahā Viṣṇu and much less make use of their belongings, for self-propitiation. One of the land-tenants of Piḷḷai uraṅkāvilli tācar, a great devotee of Lord Viṣṇu, was tormented by the village deity known as Aiyaṉār. For the appeasement of its wrath, the deity demanded that it be offered milk and fruits, be smeared with scented sandal paste, be nicely dressed and bedecked and then be taken out in a ceremonial procession in a litter with umbrellas held over its head. The villagers borrowed all these things from their master, the Tācar, and put through the procession, as demanded by the deity. But what was the result? The tortures of the tormented tenant were only redoubled. Queried by the villagers about its strange behaviour, the deity gave out: " You fellows have brought me the articles belonging to Tācar; under his umbrella, I feel blistered by the Sun, the sandal paste burns me out like fire, his ornaments hang on me like heavy fetters and so, I shall surely take this man's life. "

itu kāṇmiṉ, aṉṉaimīr! ik kaṭṭuvicci col-koṇṭu, nīr
etuvāṉum ceytu, aṅku ōr kaḷḷum iṟaicciyum tūvēṉmiṉ;
matu vār tuḷāy muṭi māyap pirāṉ kaḻal vāḻttiṉāl,
atuvē ivaḷ uṟṟa nōykkum aru maruntu ākumē. (IV–6–3)

Translation

Look here, ye, elders, try the recipe I suggest,
Listen not to this gipsy, you'd better desist
From offering meat and liquor; if you would but laud
The feet of the wondrous Lord with tuḷaci garland,
Studded with honey, on His crown, the sure remedy
It will be for this young lady's unique malady.

Note

The mate appeals to the good sense of the elderly ladies, not to be led astray by the queer nostrums of the gipsy, the votary of a deity of a very low order, and defile the sacred precincts of Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī with such unsavoury things like meat and liquor, totally repugnant to her breeding. She also stresses the importance of singing the Lord's praise, as a sure and certain remedy for curing the Nāyakī of her malady, induced by the Lord Himself.

maruntu ākum eṉṟu, aṅku ōr māya valavai col-koṇṭu, nīr
karuñ coṟum maṟṟaic ceñ cōṟum kaḷaṉ iḻaittu eṉ payaṉ?
oruṅkākavē ulaku ēḻum viḻuṅki umiḻntiṭṭa
peruntēvaṉ pēr collakiṟkil, ivaḷaip peṟutirē, (IV-6-4)

Translation

Ye, ladies, what use is there, applying remedies queer,
Leaving lumps of cooked rice, black and red,
At the junction of cross-roads, by a quack misled?
For this Nāyakī's revival, better chant within her hearing,
The holy names of the Lord Supreme, Who ate
The worlds seven (during deluge) and then spat out.

Note

Once again, the importance of chanting the Lord's holy names, proclaiming His glory, is emphasised by the mate besides repeating the warning, not to be led astray by the quacks.

ivaḷaip peṟum paricu iv aṇaṅku āṭutal aṉṟu; antō!
kuvaḷait taṭaṅ kaṇṇum kōvaic cevvāyum payantaṉaḷ;
kavaḷak kaṭāk kal'ṟu aṭṭa pirāṉ tirunāmattāl
tavaḷap poṭik koṇṭu nīr iṭṭiṭumiṉ; taṇiyumē. (IV-6-5)

Translation

Ye, folks, this Nāyakī is terribly off colour,
Alas! the methods you adopt can't save her;
Singing the names of the Lord who slew the tusker
In must, let the dust from the feet of devotees pure
Be on her strewn, there's no remedy, so sure.

Notes

Finding that the methods, adopted by the elderly women around, worsen the condition of Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī, her mate lustily pleads with them to give up all their unwholesome activities and follow the certain remedy suggested by her. All that needs to be done is to scatter on the Nāyakī's person, the dust collected from the feet of the devotees, pious and pure, to the accompaniment of the chanting of the names of the Supreme Lord. To preserve the Nāyakī is to preserve the Lord Himself, as the Lord thrives and subsists on her nourishing looks.

Two separate remedies, namely, chanting the names of the Lord within the Nāyakī's hearing and smearing her with the dust off the feet of Śrī Vaiṣṇavas, have been prescribed for warding off the twin evils of contact with inferior deities and contact with those who have dealings with those deities, respectively.

taṉ'yum poḷutu illai nīr aṇaṅku āṭutir; aṉṉaimīr!
piṇiyum oḻikiṉṟatu illai, perukum itu allāl;
maṇiyiṉ aṇi niṟa māyaṉ-tamar aṭi nīṟu koṇṭu
aṇiya muyaliṉ, maṟṟu illai kaṇṭīr-iv aṇaṅkukkē. (IV-6-6)

Translation

Ye, mothers, pity it is, in wrong methods you persist,
It does only aggravate the malady; I insist
That you on this young lady smear the dust
Off the feet of devotees of the Lord Who excels
The blue gem rare; no other remedy can work so well.

Notes

(i) The elders pay no heed to the advice of the mate and persist in propitiating the inferior deity, which only aggravates the malady of the Nāyakī. An exasperated mate now asks them to stop their activities forthwith and smear the Nāyakī with the dust from the feet of Śrī Vaiṣṇavas. When the women plead that it is beyond them to collect the dust in question, the mate advises them to think of it, at least, as even the mere thought of doing so will cure the Nāyakī. Resolving to do the right thing and giving up the wrong things are two of the six pre-conditions for 'Prapatti' or loving surrender to the Lord's grace, as laid down in 'Śrī Pāñcarātra'. Whereas even the mere resolve to do what is right is enough, the evil or wrong things have to be necessarily given up. And so, the elderly women

are asked to give up their unwholesome activities and just contemplate the right step, namely, smearing Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī with the dust off the devotees' feet.

(ii) Here is an anecdote to prove the efficacy of the dust from the holy feet of devotees, by way of removing the contamination from inferior deities. Two devout followers of Sri Rāmānuja accompanied Akaḷaṅka nāṭṭāḻvāṉ, a prince, while going to some place. On the way, the Prince pointed to a jain temple with images of lion in front, and jokingly asked his followers to prostrate, saying that it was their favourite Viṣṇu temple. It was dark and they couldn't clearly make out which temple it was but they took the Prince at his word and reverently prostrated in front of the temple. When, however, a little later, they came to know that it was a jain temple, the shock was too great for them and they fainted. It was only when Piḷḷai-uraṅkāvilli Tācar, a very intimate disciple of Śrī Rāmānuja, arrived on the spot and smeared them with the dust from his feet, that they recovered their consciousness and got up. (The greatness of Tācar has already been alluded to, in the notes under IV-6-2).

(iii) Once, when Nañcīyar and his disciples were assembled in an enclosure, near the holy pavilion inside the temple of Lord Raṅganātha, this very theme of smearing the dust of holy men on the God-sick came up for discussion. One of the disciples wished to be enlightened as to how the foot-dust of the holy men is prescribed as the cure for a malady induced by the Lord Himself, instead of the very cause (the Lord) being also looked upon as the cure for the God-afflicted. The illustrious Preceptor elucidated that there are two distinct stages, namely, initial recovery through first-aid and then the Sovereign remedy. If buttermilk, the antidote for fits is not ready at hand, ginger-powder is applied to the patient's nostrils, as a preliminary measure. The sprinkling of the dust of the holy men corresponds to the application of ginger-powder to the patient's nostrils and when the patient recovers his breath somewhat, then the butter

milk, the sovereign remedy, the beatific vision of Lord Kṛṣṇa(the Divine Charioteer, longed for, vide IV-6-1) will be administered.

aṇaṅkukku aru maruntu eṉṟu, aṅku ōr āṭum kaḷḷum parāy,
tuṇaṅkai eṟintu, num tōḷ kulaikkappaṭum aṉṉaimīr!
uṇaṅkal keṭak kaḻutai utaṭu āṭṭam kaṇṭu eṉ payaṉ?
vaṇaṅkirkaḷ māyap pirāṉ-tamar vētam vallāraiyē. (IV-6-7)

Translation

Ye, elders, you think it is a cure rare and dear,
For this young lady's sickness when you offer
Unto the inferior deity, sheep and liquor and, in distress, witness
Men with trembling shoulders in awkward dance;
Could you the moving lips of a donkey keep admiring
As it eats up the paddy, spread out for drying?
Better worship Vedic scholars, the holy men of the wondrous
Lord.

Notes

(i) The mate disconcertingly asks the elders what exactly they mean by persisting in all that tom-foolery, at the expense of Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī. What they do is like admiring the movement of the lips of a donkey noted for its ugliness, as it eats up the boiled paddy spread out in the open for sun-drying, unmindful of the loss of paddy. She advises them to worship the holy men who realise that Lord Śrīman Nārāyaṇa is the Supreme God and revere Him. There and there alone lies the cure for this God-sickness.

(ii) The mate feels distressed that the women-folk should indulge in such futile exercises, ill-conceived and disastrous, notwithstanding their special religious background and their ingrained belief that a single salutation by them would be deemed by the Lord, too heavy a burden imposed on Him.

vētam vallārkaḷaik koṇṭu, viṇṇōr perumāṉ tirup
pātam paṇintu, ivaḷ nōy itu tīrttuk koḷḷātu pōy,
ētam paṟaintu, alla ceytu, kaḷ ūṭu kalāyt tūy,
kītam muḻavu iṭṭu, nīr aṇaṅku āṭutal kīḻmaiyē, (IV-6-8)

Translation

What you do, ye, mothers, is derogatory indeed,
Speaking words unseemly, with a liberal use of liquor
Amidst drum-beats propitiating the deity inferior,
Instead of worshipping the feet of the Supreme Lord,
Chief of Celestials, thro' the good offices of Vedic Scholars,
To cure the sickness of this young lady, the remedy sure.

Notes

(i) The mate advises the womenfolk to desist from the propitiation of minor deities and adore instead the feet of the Supreme Lord through the good offices of the Vedic Scholars, the Lord's devotees, and get Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī cured of her God-sickness.

The direct approach to the Lord is hazardous like mounting an elephant in the absence of its keeper. That is why it has been ordained that the supplicant should be ushered in by the Lord's devotees. It is noteworthy that Vibhīṣaṇa sought asylum in Rāma's camp, only through his appeal to the monkeys around and Sugrīva also got at Śrī Rāma only through Hanumān.

(ii) In the preceding song (IV-6-7), the holy men were required to be worshipped, while in this song, the Lord is required to be worshipped through the mediation of the holy men. This apparent discrepancy is reconciled by Nampiḷḷai, as follows: "There is, of course, no need to worship anyone other than the pious Śrī Vaiṣṇavas. And yet, it is extremely difficult to shake off the complex of fellowship and look upon other humans, like ourselves, as the Supreme and revere them with unflinching devotion. Hence, the next best, namely, looking upon them as efficient mediators for presenting us to the Lord, is recommended".

(iii) The unseemly words are those uttered by the priest or other oracle of the inferior deity, getting into a trance, possessed by the deity. The mate warns the elders that the wrong tactics adopted by them will be a slur on their progeny as well and pull them down.

kīḻmaiyināl aṅku ōr kīḻmakaṉ iṭṭa muḻaviṉ kīḻ
nāḻmai pala colli, nīr aṇaṅku āṭum poy kāṇkilēṉ;
ēḻmaip piṟappukkum cēmam; in nōykkum ītē maruntu;
ūḻmaiyil kaṇṇa-pirāṉ kaḻal vāḻttumiṉ, uṉṉittē! (IV-6-9)

Translation

Ye, womenfolk, witness I can't your activities base,
The dirty concert of a mean fellow and hear the rotten words
By him uttered; meditate on Kaṇṇaṉ's feet and praise
His glory; for generations it will do you good,
It will cure this lady's sickness besides.

Note

While condemning the base activities indulged by the womenfolk, the mate advises them to meditate on Lord Kṛṣṇa's feet and sing His glory, as this will operate both ways, that is, it will stand them in good stead for generations to come besides curing Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī of her God-sickness. This is like those harvesting jute making bundles of it with jute itself, unlike the paddy stalks, for tying which one has to look for some other material, a string or rope.

uṉṉittu maṟṟu oru teyvam toḻāaḷ, avaṉai allāl;
num iccai colli, num tōḷ kulaikkappaṭum aṉṉaimīr!
maṉṉappaṭum maṟaivāṇaṉai, vaṇ tuvarāpati
maṉṉaṉai, ēttumiṉ! ēttutalum, toḻutu āṭumē. (IV-6-10)

Translation

Mother, You mouth base words at will
And in awkward dance your shoulders tremble;
None but the Lord Supreme this lady will deem
Fit for worship, You'll therefore do well to hymn

In praise of the lovely Prince of Tuvarāpati, by scriptures adored
And revive this lady, make her dance and go gay galore.

Notes

(i) The mate insists that the womenfolk should take due note of the Nāyakī's unbounded love for Lord Kṛṣṇa, the Prince of Dvārakā and remould their activities suitably. "What fun is it, tending the nose for an injury in the knee?"

(ii) Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī has never worshipped any one but the Supreme Lord, not even as a tender child. The crescent moon is usually worshipped by young children but Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī didn't do that, even at that tender age.

(iii) The mate vehemently deprecates the elderly women's mis-directed activities, ill-fitting and totally unbecoming of the clan to which they belong. By indulging in these activities, they harm themselves as well as the cause they intend to serve, namely, relieving Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī of her sickness. On the other hand, if they praised the Prince of Dvārakā, it will elevate them and also revive the Nāyakī, making her get up and dance with Joy.

toḻutu āṭi, tū maṇi vaṇṇaṉukku āṭceytu, nōy tīrnta
vaḻuvāta tol pukaḻ vaṇ kurukūrc caṭakōpaṉ col
vaḻuvāta āyirattuḷ ivai pattu veṟikaḷum
toḻutu āṭip pāṭa vallār tukka cīlam ilarkaḷē. (IV-6-11)

Translation

They will of miseries be rid that recite, adoring and dancing,
These songs ten, deprecating those that go about appeasing
Minor deities, out of the flawless thousand of Caṭakōpaṉ,
Chief of lovely Kurukūr, of flawless fame in-born,
Who danced in adoration of the lovely Lord, gem-hued
And serving Him, with devotion great, got his sickness cured.

Notes

(i) This decad has clearly brought out the Āḻvār's unflinching and exclusive devotion to Lord Viṣṇu (Śrīman Nārāyaṇa), of sapphire hue and his intolerance of those who stray into the domain of worship of the minor deities. The elderly women listened to the mate's advice, at long last, and by adoring the Supreme Lord and dancing, in a body, singing His praise, they did help the Nāyakī regain her consciousness. It is not as if she got a cure as such, much less a complete cure. Actually, it is an incurable malady, not being of the ordinary run. This God-sickness lasts as long as the Soul exists and the Soul never dies.

(ii) This end-song confers the boon of relief from all miseries, particularly, the pangs of misery of separation from the Lord, like those undergone by the Āḻvār, on all those who recite these ten songs, with great devotion. The chanters will not run the miserable risk of contamination by straying into the domain of worship of minor deities.

Fourth Centum—Seventh Decad (IV-7)
(Cīlam illāc ciṟiyaṉ)

Preamble

The Āḻvār, who was insensate in the last decad, due to the poignancy of his separation from the Lord, just regained consciousness, when the holy names of the Lord, chanted by the women around, trickled down his ears. This is like a creeper, dried up and lying low, becoming green again, when rain-drops fall on it. But then, it has only made matters worse for the Āḻvār. While in a state of coma, the patient feels no pain but when he regains consciousness, the pain becomes all the more acute. Hunger pinches a person to the marrow of his bone but luckily, sleep overtakes him. Hunger does not press its claim for the duration of his sleep but when he wakes up, the pangs of hunger are even more pronounced than before.

The Āḻvār keeps mulling how the Lord, who is a friend-in-need, capable of dispensing the appropriate remedies, could keep away from him. Unable to stand the separation, he cries out his

heart so lustily that it melts down the hearts of his listeners too, as Sita did, during her captivity in Laṅkā.

cīlam illāc ciṟiyaṉēlum, ceyviṉaiyō peritāl;
ñālam uṇṭāy! ñāṉa mūrtti! nārāyaṇā! eṉṟu eṉṟu,
kālantōṟum yāṉ iruntu, kaitalaipūcaliṭṭāl,
kōla mēṉi kāṇa vārāy; kūviyum koḷḷāyē. (IV–7–1)

Translation

Bereft of merit, I am indeed small
And yet, the evil in me looms large;
Alas! respond you don't to my lusty call
As Nārāyaṇa, Sustainer of the worlds (during deluge),
Knowledge incarnate, and so on, many a time, with hands lifted overhead;
Neither do you come And let me your bewitching Form behold
Nor do You lift me up, unto your sweet fold.

Notes

(i) Even if one did not actually do anything good, the mere thought or intention to do good things will suffice and it can yield good results. In respect of evil, however, it is only the actual commission of evil acts that is harmful and not the mere contemplation of it. And so, the Āḻvār says that he has actually perpetrated evil deeds to a very large extent and that this impedes his getting at the Lord.

(ii) *Knowledge incarnate*

The individual Soul also possesses knowledge but that gets perverted and puts him or her, right into the world, eking out a miserable existence, literally lame and blind. On the other hand, the Lord's knowledge is pure and unalloyed; there is scarcely a thing He doesn't know and nothing is beyond His capacity to do. The Individual, lame and blind, therefore, needs to be guided by the Lord. Such an obligation, on the part of the Lord, cannot be disowned by Him because He is Nārāyaṇa, in whom all things and beings subsist.

(iii) The Lord's bewitching Form is intended to be seen and enjoyed by His devotees and yet, how can He stay away from the Āḻvār, like keeping a pot of nicely flavoured water out of bound to the thirsty? The other alternative, which is only the second best, is to call him off to the heavenly abode.

(iv) It is noteworthy that all the five topics (Artha pañcaka) have been mentioned in this song: (1) Nārāyaṇa—the Super-Soul; (2) The small self—the Individual Soul; (3) Beckoning the Lord—The Lord is at once the 'Means' for attaining Him; (4) Beholding the Lord—The 'End' or the destined goal and (5) Large volume of evil—The impediments for the influx of the Lord's grace.

koḷḷa māḷā iṉpa veḷḷam kōtu ila tantiṭum eṉ
vaḷḷa'ēyō! vaiyam koṇṭa vāmaṉāvō! eṉṟu eṉṟu,
naḷ irāvum naṉ pakalum nāṉ iruntu, ōlamiṭṭāl,
kaḷḷa māyā uṉṉai eṉ kaṇ kāṇa vantu īyāyē. (IV–7–2)

Translation

Day and night, I call You out with love immense
And ardour great, as Vāmaṇa, Who the worlds did measure,
The Donor great, Who on revelling devotees confers
Bliss unlimited with no reserve and Yet there's no response
Oh, elusive Lord, You deign not to come and feast my eyes.

Note

When the Āḻvār refers to the Lord as the great Donor, conferring limitless bliss, he is only recalling his own experience in IV-5, a painful contrast indeed, with the present predicament. If, as Vāmaṇa, He could beg of Bali and get back the lost territory for Indra, the self-seeker, should the Lord withhold Himself from a selfless devotee like the Āḻvār who seeks none but the Lord Himself?

īvu ilāta tīviṉaikaḷ ettaṉai ceytaṉaṉkol?
tāvi vaiyam koṇṭa entāy! tāmōtarā! eṉṟu eṉṟu,
kūvik kūvi, neñcu uruki, kaṇṇaṉi cōra niṉṟāl,
pāvi nī eṉṟu oṉṟu collāy, pāviyēṉ kāṇa vantē. (IV–7–3)

Translation

Endless sins I should have indeed committed,
Therefore it is, You come not before this sinner,
At least to say so, though I call You out many times over,
With melting heart and tearful eyes, as my Lord,
Who measured the worlds and Tāmōtarā, (got bound by a cord).

Note

The Āḷvār lustily calls out the Lord, stressing alternately His transcendent glory when He measured all the regions, high and low, in just three strides, and His amazing simplicity as the naughty child (Tāmōtarā), whose tummy was bound by a rope, as a punishment for stealing butter. It matters not to him whether the Lord calls Him a Saint or a Sinner and even if the Lord wants to despise him as a sinner, the Āḷvār would want Him to come, face to face, and say so, as he will then have the pleasure of seeing Him. Even if the Lord would not appear before the Āḷvār, the latter will be pleased if the Lord could tell, within his hearing, that he is a despicable sinner. The Āḷvār will then have the satisfaction of hearing the Lord's voice.

kāṇa vantu, eṉ kaṇmukappē tāmaraikkaṇ piṟaḷa,
āṇi cempoṉ mēṉi entāy! niṉṟu-aruḷāy! eṉṟu eṉṟu,
nāṇam illāc ciṟutakaiyēṉ nāṉ iṅku alaṟṟuvatu eṉ–
pēṇi vāṉōr kāṇamāṭṭāp pītu uṭai appaṉaiyē? (IV–7–4)

Translation

To come up to me, shamelessly do I beckon, all the time,
The redoubted Lord, even (Brahmā and other Devas) seeking Him
Can hardly behold, of the hue of red gold, pure and fine,
That this mean fellow may on His lotus eyes feast, how futile!

Notes

(i) In aspiring to behold the Supreme Lord, beyond the reach of even Brahmā and other Devas seeking Him ardently, the Āḷvār feels that he is attempting the impossible. And yet, he calls Him out all the time, because of his deep yearning.

(ii) The cloud-hued Lord is referred to here, as of the complexion of red gold. The comparison is not on all fours and what is intended to convey is that the Lord's complexion is just as attractive as red gold of the highest refinement. It could also be that the gold complexion of the Divine Mother is reflected on His person, turning it also into gold colour.

appaṉē! aṭal-āḻiyāṉē! āḻ kaṭalaik kaṭainta
tuppaṉē! uṉ tōḷkaḷ nāṉkum kaṇṭiṭakkūṭuṅkol? eṉṟu,
eppoḻutum kaṇṇa nīr koṇṭu, āvi tuvarntu tuvarntu,
ippoḻutē vantiṭāy eṉṟu ēḻaiyēṉ nōkkuvaṉē. (IV–7–5)

Translation

Oh, Benefactor great, my potent Lord, holding the discus valiant,
The ocean deep you did churn and delivered the nectar,
Eager to behold your lovely shoulders four, I want
You to come up to me right now; tears welling up for ever,
Greedily do I look around my Soul drying up, again and again,

Notes

(i) The Āḷvār exclaims how greedy he is trying to see the Lord, inaccessible even to the exalted Brahmā and other Devas, and that too, right now. But then, he longs to see the Lord's shoulders unlike the Devas who were, all the time, looking at the ocean for the nectar to come up, foregoing the pleasure of beholding the Lord moving around with His thousand shoulders, gaily bedecked with exquisite garlands. With the prior knowledge of

His condescending love unto Gajendra and Prahlāda, the Āḷvār is so certain of the Lord's unfailing response that he keeps looking around for Him all the time.

(ii) *The greedy looks*: Here is a thrilling anecdote. Krimikaṇṭa, a cōḷa king, was a rash bigot of Śaivism. He launched a crusade of religious persecution and forcibly compelled every one to sign a bull, he had proclaimed, to the effect that there was no other God but Śiva. Kūrattāḷvāṉ, an intimate disciple of Śri Rāmānuja, was also ordered to sign the declaration in the Royal court. He not only declined to do so but vindicated the supremacy of Lord Viṣṇu, quoting chapter and verse. The enraged king, however, ordered Āḷvāṉ's eyes to be gouged but Āḷvān plucked out his eyes himself, exclaiming that the pair of eyes which had the misfortune to see the wicked king, weren't worth having any more. When Śrī Rāmānuja got to know about this later, his heart bled at this catastrophe and he intensely longed for the restoration of Āḷvāṉ's eye-sight. At the Master's command, the blinded Āḷvāṉ composed hymns lauding Lord Varadaraja, enshrined in Kāñchīpuram, known as 'Varadarāja S ava' when the verses were read out by Āḷvāṉ to Śri Rāmānuja, the latter rejoiced, in particular, when he came upon the twentysecond verse, and burst out, "Āḷvāṉ, when the Lord listens to this particular verse, He cannot but grant you the vision to behold Him. Well, turn this side, let me scan your face, right now". This anecdote illustrates the firm belief of the devotees that the Lord will surely respond to such a moving submission.

nōkki nōkki, uṉṉaik kāṇpāṉ, yāṉ eṉatu āviyuḷḷē
nākku niḷvaṉ; ñāṉam illai-nāḷtōṟum eṉṉuṭaiya
ākkaiyuḷḷum, āviyuḷḷum, alla puṟattiṉuḷḷum
nīkkam iṉṟi, eṅkum niṉṟāy! niṉṉai aṟintu aṟintē. (IV–7–6)

Translation

What a fool am I to hold out my tongue (and in my heart)
Long to behold Your form exquisite and for You look around,
Knowing full well that You who pervade all round
And at all times, my body, soul, limbs and other parts,
With no exception, will not unto me Your grace impart!

Notes

(i) *Āḷvār to the Lord*: "My Lord, You don't make yourself visible unto poor me, despite Your pervading among other things my entire being, because You are not so inclined. This is quite evident and yet, I keep looking for You in all directions, like the innocent children aspiring for things they can't have, holding out their tongues all the time, unable to conceal their longing. Of course, as You are aware, seeing You is an end in itself, as far as I am concerned.

(ii) Here is a juicy observation of Nampiḷḷai: Like unto a person having plenty of money, tied up in bundles and kept inside, still wandering about in search of money outside, with aching legs (swollen), the Āḷvār is not contented with the enjoyment of the Lord in His full complement inside him, and tires himself out, looking for Him outside!

aṟintu aṟintu, tēṟit tēṟi, yāṉ eṉatu āviyuḷḷē
niṟainta ñāṉa mūrttiyāyai niṉmalamāka vaittu,
piṟantum cettum niṉṟu iṭarum pētaimai tīrntoḷintēṉ–
naṟun tuḷāyiṉ kaṇṇi ammā! nāṉ uṉṉaik kaṇṭukoṇṭē.(IV–7–7)

Translation

Oh, Sire, sporting the tuḷaci garland fragrant,
(My mind) could behold You and knowing You full well
(As the 'Means' and the 'End' combined), I do revel
With all clarity and in my heart immaculate
Is my nescience which gave rise to birth and death.

Note

Lord to the Āḷvār: Oh, Āḷvār, why do you vex yourself in this manner as though I have done you nothing? Can't you recollect at least a few things you have got from Me?

Alvar to the Lord: My Lord, I wouldn't fail to acknowledge the many favours you have done me. you have of course imparted to me knowledge, clear and concise, free from imperfections and blemishes of any kind, and further clarified it by impressing upon me Your transcendent glory, easy- worshippability, easy-accessibility, readiness to forgive, the pre-eminence of your 'Arca' (iconic manifestation) etc. With my nescience thus rooted out, I also stand rid of the terrific involvement in the cycle of birth and death. I also enjoy your vision mentally; you are perfect knowledge personified. And yet, how can I rest contented unless I came face to face with you?

kaṇṭukoṇtu, eṉ kaikaḷ āra, niṉ tiruppātaṅkaḷmēl
eṇ-ticaiyum uḷḷa pūk koṇṭu ētti, ukantu ukantu,
toṇṭarōṅkaḷ pāṭi āṭa, cūḷ kaṭal ñālattuḷḷē
vaṇ-tuḷāyiṉ kaṇṇi vēntē! vantiṭakillāyē. (IV–7–8)

Translation

Oh, Sovereign Master, bedecked with tuḷaci garlands comely,
Why don't you appear before me in this very land,
By ocean surrounded, that I can feast on Your Form lovely,
Gather choice flowers from everywhere and with my hands
Offer them lustily at Your holy feet and laud you in a chorus,
Singing and dancing with delight immense?

Note

Having enumerated in the preceding song, the favours already received by him from the Lord, the Āḻvār now lists out what he stills needs from Him. The eyes, hitherto starved, must feast on His nectarean charm, the hands which remained idle so far, should be fully engaged in gathering flowers from all the eight directions and offering them at the feet of the Lord to his heart's content; seeing the Lord's delight, he and his fellow-devotees should give vent to their joy, singing and dancing. Without deferring all this enjoyment till he reaches heaven, he should be enabled to have it all, right here. When one feels enormously thirsty, the thirst needs

to be quenched there and then; there is hardly any point in extending a promise to relieve the thirst some time later, at some other place. The Lord is required to present Himself before the Āḻvār, right here, in all that heavenly splendour, which is precisely what the Celestials drink deep all the time. This, he has been praying for, since long, and yet, the Lord hasn't responded. This sums up the present plight of the Āḻvar.

iṭakilēṉ; oṉṟu aṭṭa killēṉ; aimpulaṉ vella killēṉ;
kaṭavaṉ āki, kālantōṟum pūp paṟittu ētta killēṉ;
maṭa val neñcam kātal kūra, valviṉaiyēṉ ayarppāyt
taṭavukiṉṟēṉ; eṅkuk kāṇpaṉ-cakkarattu aṇṇalaiyē? (IV–7–9)

Translation

Alms I gave not, nor did I allay to any extent
The thirst of others, the senses five I kept not under restraint,
Flowers I offered not unto the Lord at the appropriate time,
Rash and hard-hearted, an impudent fool I am,
Sinner heavy, I am still fondly groping thro', to get hold
Of the Lord, wielding the discus; Him where shall I behold?

Notes

The Āḻvār puts himself the question whether he, who did not pursue the disciplines of 'Karma-yoga' etc, had at all the 'Means' to get at the Lord. All the above-mentioned omissions and transgressions notwithstanding, the Āḻvār fondly hopes to get hold of the Lord, gripping the discus even as Queen Yaśodhā caught hold of Śrī Kṛṣṇa red handed while gripping (stealing) butter.

cakkarattu aṇṇalē! eṉṟu tāḻntu, kaṇṇīr tatumpa,
pakkam nōkki niṉṟu alantēṉ; pāviyēṉ kāṇkiṉṟilēṉ;
mikka ñāṉa mūrtti āya vēta viḷakkiṉai eṉ
takka ñāṉak kaṇkaḷālē kaṇṭu taḻuvuvaṉē. (IV–7–10)

Translation

With tears welling up my eyes, I looked around,
But sinner that I am, I remain worn out and frustrated;

Behold I don't my Sire, holding the discus and yet, in my mind,
Him I see and embrace, fed by Knowledge appropriate,
The One who is supreme knowledge personified, by Vedas illumined.

Note

If, in spite of all the efforts of the Āḻvār to see the Lord outwardly, He abstained from the Āḻvār the other alternative would be for him to forget all about the Lord and carry on as before. But then, the Lord has endowed the Āḻvār with the appropriate knowledge and is perpetually in front of his mind's eye. Forgetting the Lord is, therefore, out of the question. And so, there are two distinct facets in the Āḻvār, namely, God-love (Prema) and knowledge (Jñāna); the former makes him intensely long for external perception of the Lord, formal worship with flowers etc, as distinguished from a mere mental rapport with the Lord, which always subsists by virtue of the Alvar's profound knowledge (Jñāna)

taḻuvininṟa kātal-taṉṉāl tāmaraik kaṇṇaṉ-taṉṉai
kuḻuvu māṭat teṉ kurukūr māṟaṉ caṭakōpaṉ col
vaḻuvu ilāta oṉ tamiḻkaḷ āyirattuḷ ip pattum
taḻuvap pāṭi āṭa vallār vaikuntam ēṟuvarē. (IV–7–11)

Translation

Those that sing with zeal and revel in these songs ten,
Out of the thousand flawless Tamil songs bright of Caṭakōpaṉ,
Chief of Teṉkurukūr with a cluster of castles,
Adoring the lotus-eyed Lord with love inexhaustible,
Will the high Heavens scale (and enjoy bliss perennial).

Notes

(i) The lotus-eyed Lord having blessed the Āḻvār, right inside his mother's womb, the Āḻvār emerged into this world with God-love, ingrained in him.

(ii) The clustering of houses in Kurukūr would, *ipso facto*, denote the clustering of people, in that town. A juicy explanation for such crowding, furnished in 'Iṭu', is

that the Lord's advent in Kurukūr was expected any moment, in view of the Āḻvār's inordinate longing and people clustered around him to watch the great event. There is a strong parallel to this in Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa. At the end of his long exile Śrī Rāma met Sage Bharadwāja at the latter's āśram, enroute to Ayodhya and enquired about Bharata's welfare. The sage replied: "Yes, all are well; anxiously awaiting your return, Bharata is spending sleepless days and nights, smeared with mud raised by torrential tears from his eyes falling on the ground". If Bharata is in such a forlorn state, how could all be well there? What the Sage emphasises here is that the Intensity of Bharatha's dev tion was such that it inspired robust confidence in the citizens that Śrī Rāma would hasten his home-coming and So, they had all gathered, in great glee, to greet him.

Fourth Centum—Eighth Decad (IV-8)
(Ēṟu āḷum Iṟaiyōṉum)

Preamble

The Āḻvār's passionate appeal to the Lord, in the last decad, did not yield the desired result. The Lord didn't present Himself before the ardent devotee, and the latter, therefore, concluded that he was not in His good books. And, in this context, the Alvar felt that neither he nor his possessions deserved to exist. The very valuable Śāstraic meaning that anything, which hinders Divine Service and does not actively aid and participate in such service, deserves to be eschewed, is imparted in this decad. The Āḻvār is now in the same predicament as that of Sītā during her captivity in Laṅkā. Sītā then exclaimed that her very existence was meaningless, staying so far away from her Lord and not rescued by Him as yet. The sentiments expressed by the Āḻvār in this decad, are fully echoed by Saint Yāmuna, in Śloka 57 of his 'Stotra Ratna'. The saint swears that he would not tolerate for a moment anything which was outside the domain of His service, be it his body, his very life, the happiness desired by all beings, the Soul and other social relations like wife, children, friends etc., and that he

would want all these to get destroyed in a hundred ways, if they proved a hindrance to Divine Service.

Even in this decad, the Āḻvār continues in the feminine state, as is evident from the text of the songs referring to the Nāyakī's bangles, garments, complexion etc. Śrī Āṇṭāḷ is found even more emphatic when she says in 'Nācciyār Tirumoḻi' that, if her beloved Lord would not come and embrace her, she would rather pluck out her breasts from their base, and throw them at Him. The breasts, as already explained earlier, signify the emotional upsurge, divine love, too deep for words.

ēṟu āḷum iṟaiyōṉum, ticaimukaṉum, tirumakaḷum,
kūṟu āḷum taṉi uṭampaṉ, kulam kulamā acuṟarkaḷai
nīṟu ākumpaṭiyāka nirumittu, paṭaitoṭṭa
māṟāḷaṉ kavarāta maṇi māmai kuṟaivu ilamē. (IV–8–1)

Translation

Of what use is my complexion lovely
If it attracts not my valorous Lord,
Who resolved to rout the Asura hordes
And destroyed them with weapons deadly,
On whose unique person, vast and expansive, dwell
Ticaimukaṉ (Brahmā), Iṟaiyōṉ, whose mount is the bull
And Tirumakaḷ (Lakṣmī) (well apart)?

Note

The Āḻvār highlights the Lord's '*Sauśilya*' or condescending love, allotting portions of His body, well demarcated, for the occupation of Iṟaiyōṉ (Śiva), Brahmā and Lakṣmī. And then, the Lord's valour is talked about. By a mere resolve, He could create the entire universe and likewise, He could as well destroy all the evil forces. And yet, He incarnated, now and then, and engaged the ungodly in a personal combat and destroyed them with His mighty weapons, simply because of His intolerance of their affront to His devotees. The enemies of His devotees are regarded by Him as His opponents and He will never forgive them. If the Lord, so loving and valorous, did not come and delightfully pounce upon

Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī, of what use is her lovely complexion? She too, finds no charm in a complexion which ceases to attract the Lord.

maṇi māmai kuṟaivu illā malarmātar uṟai mārpaṉ,
aṇi māṉat taṭa varaittōḷ aṭal-āḻit taṭakkaiyaṉ,
paṇi māṉam piḻaiyāmē aṭiyēṉaip paṇikoṇṭa
maṇimāyaṉ kavarāta maṭa neñcāl kuṟaivu ilamē. (IV–8–2)

Translation

Even my docile mind I shall discard outright,
If it attracts not my Lord of sapphire hue,
Who did in His service enlist this vassal all right,
Who holds the discus bright in His hand huge,
Of shoulders, stout and strong, on whose chest
Resides the lotus-born (Lakṣmī), of hue exquisite.

Notes

(i) It was the charming conjunction of the Lord and Lakṣmī of exquisite complexion that attracted the Āḻvār and enlisted him as their vassal. And yet, if the Lord is not attracted by his docile mind, of what use is it to him either? Naññcīyar would elucidate this, as follows: There was a time when the Nāyakī's mind was unto her lover as delectable as high-class sandal paste vide IV-3-1. The Nāyakī's discarding her mind in the present state is comparable to the frustrated female lover breaking the cosmetic bottle, right in front of her beloved to express her resentment over the latter's delayed appearance.

(ii) Lakṣmī's complexion is exquisite and of undiminishing charm as she dwells on His winsome chest inseparably, unlike the Āḻvār's complexion, which suffers for want of such patronage.

(iii) The Āḻvār's service, referred to, in this song, is the '*Vācika Kaiṅkarya*', that is singing the Lord's glory in these hymns. The Lord is said to have enlisted the Āḻvār, in His service, *in a punctilious manner*. Here is an

instructive anecdote. In the holy monastery of Sri Rāmānuja, the Śrī Vaiṣṇavas used to be fed daily and they were served by Kiṭāmpi-Āccāṉ, a disciple of Śrī Rāmānuja. One of those days, Śrī Rāmānuja noticed Āccāṉ serving drinking water to the guests, standing sideways, a sort of indifference or lack of respect for the guests, Śrī Rāmānuja ran up to him and striking him on the back, burst out: "You dud! don't you know that you have to serve the guests reverently, by standing in front and facing them?" Without feeling hurt, in the least, Āccāṉ gratefully acknowledged the Master's correction, administered out of his abundant affection for the disciple and bowed unto him, reciting the appropriate line from this song as in the original text.

maṭa neñcāl kuṟaivu illā makaḷtāyceytu oru pēycci
viṭa nañca mulai cuvaitta miku ñāṉac ciṟu kuḻavi,
paṭa nākattu aṇaik kiṭanta paru varait tōḷ parampuruṭaṉ,
neṭumāyaṉ kavarāta niṟaiyiṉāl kuṟaivu ilamē. (IV–8–3)

Translation

My sense of modesty I shall abjure if it attracts not
The Lord Supreme, of wondrous deeds unlimited,
Of shoulders, huge and hefty, resting on hooded serpent-bed,
Who, as the little babe with Knowledge great, sucked the life out,
Of the demoness that played the mother perfect
And suckled Him with deadly poison on her breast.

Notes

(i) In the preceding song, the Nāyakī disowned her mind, on the ground that it failed to attract the Lord and become the object of His affection. And now, she is prepared to abjure her sense of modesty, which had kept her under restraint so long, thinking that the Lord would come to her of His own accord. What is the good of her modesty, after she has been discarded by the Lord who had once lavished on her all His affections?

(ii) *The little Babe with knowledge great*

Pūtanā, the demoness played the perfect mother and Kṛṣṇa, the Omniscient Babe also played the perfect babe, and sucked her breasts, coated with deadly poison, without the reservation usually shown to strangers and, in the bargain, sucked her life out. Thence forward, even Yaśodhā was awakened to the realisation that it was not a mere babe and began to look upon it with great awe. That is why Śrī Kṛṣṇa is referred to, in this song, as the Omniscient Babe, '*the little babe with great knowledge*', even as the Lord's devotees have been referred to elsewhere as the 'little big men', that is, men of great prowess moving about, in frail physical frames.

(iii) *The Lord Supreme* (*Parampuruṭaṉ*): It is only when He reclines on Ādiśeṣa, the Lord looks the Supreme Sovereign that He is, like unto the gem, well set on the foil.

niṟaiyiṉāl kuṟaivu illā neṭum paṇait tōḷ maṭap piṉṉai
poṟaiyiṉāl mulai aṇaivāṉ, poru viṭai ēḻ aṭarttu, ukanta
kaṟaiyiṉār tuvar uṭukkai kaṭai āviṉ kaḻi kōl kaic
caṟaiyiṉār kavarāta taḷir niṟattāl kuṟaivu ilamē. (IV–8–4)

Translation

This tender leaf-like complexion of mine
Is by me hardly liked when it holds no attraction
For (Kṛṣṇa), my Lord, Who His body tends not, whose cloth leathern.
Bears many a stain, Who, with bamboo pipe and lovely whip,
Moves about, Who tamed the unruly bulls seven, to grip
And embrace piṉṉai with shoulders long and feminine perfection.

Note

The pastoral life led by the Lord, as Kṛṣṇa, the young cow-herd is vividly described in this song, in all its details. The shepherds wear cloth made of leather, when they move about in the forests tending the cows and calves, as a safeguard against brambles and bushes. The wild fruits they gather

in plenty, tie them up in clothes and eat, thereby staining the clothes. They always carry with them the whip to control the cattle and the vessel made of bamboo pipe to hold milk, as and when the cows are milked. They seldom bathed, and even on the few occasions they had some sort of a bath, it was only partial. Even this semblance of a bath, Kṛṣṇa didn't have, as he had hardly the time for it, tending, as he was, the cattle all the time. This only exemplifies His sole concern for His subjects. The word, 'Caṟaiyiṉār', in the text of this song, could mean either the one, not tending his body or the bell the shepherds tie round the waist the tingling sound whereof would guide the movement of the cattle following them.

taḷir niṟattāl kuṟaivu illāt taṉic ciṟaiyil viḷappu uṟṟa
kiḷimoḻiyāḷ kāraṇamāk kiḷar arakkaṉ nakar eritta
kaḷi malart tuḷāy alaṅkal kamaḻ muṭiyaṉ, kaṭal ñālattu
aḻimikkāṉ kavarāta aṟiviṉāl kuṟaivu ilamē. (IV–8–5)

Translation

Knowledge is of no avail unto me as well
If it attracts not (aids not service unto) the Lord,
Full of love, sporting on His crown tuḷaci garland of fragrance full,
Shedding honey in plenty, Who the city destroyed
Of (Rāvaṇa), the demon haughty, and rescued
The sweet-tongued (Sītā) of peerless grace
And exquisite complexion from her captivity unique.

Notes

(i) *Captivity unique*: Rāmāyaṇa is said to describe the greatness of Sītā, the captive. The greatness of Sītā's captivity in Laṅkā lies in the spontaniety with which she courted imprisonment in Laṅkā and underwent unspeakable sufferings, in order to secure the release of the numerous celestial beauties, kept in bondage by the formidable Rāvaṇa-an act of grace galore! The superficial reader who sees not the element of grace but only a Sītā, forcibly abducted by the love-smitten Rāvaṇa, completely misses the mark.

(ii) *Sweet-tongued Sītā*: On return from his pioneering visit to Laṅkā, Hanuman narrated to Śrī Rāma, the dialogue between him and Sītā. This sent Śrī Rāma musing over the sweet speech of Sītā and he exclaimed: 'Madhurā Madhurālāpā.'

(iii) True knowledge is that which keeps one's mind wetted to the Supreme Lord. The so-called knowledge of mundane affairs, divorced from divine consciousness, however perfect in its own right, is hardly worth its while; it is not knowledge in the real sense.

aṟiviṉāl kuṟaivu illā akal ñālattavar aṟiya,
neṟi ellām eṭuttu uraitta, niṟai ñāṉattu orumūrtti,
kuṟiya māṇ uru āki, koṭuṅ kōḷāl nilam koṇṭa
kiṟi ammāṉ kavarāta kiḷar oḷiyāl kuṟaivu ilamē. (IV–8–6)

Translation

My charming beauty is unto me of no avail
When it holds no charm unto the Lord unique, of Knowledge full,
Who did, unto the people of this wide world, knowledge impart,
The ways and means of attaining Him and all that,
Who, as the midget resourceful, got land (from Bali), on the sly.

Note

The Lord Himself has clearly set out, in Bhagavad Gītā, the ways and means of attaining Him. Those who are not amenable to advice, He would entice by His alluring Charm and His exquisite Form, enthralling every one, as in the case of Mahā Bali. "Of what use is my comeliness if my Lord, so generous, is not attracted by it? the Āḻvār questions himself.

kiḷar oḷiyāl kuṟaivu illā ari uruvāyk kiḷarntu eḻuntu,
kiḷar oḷiya iraṇiyaṉatu akal mārpam kiḻittu ukanta,
vaḷar oḷiya kaṉal-āḻi valampuriyaṉ, maṇi nila
vaḷar oḷiyāṉ kavarāta vari vaḷaiyāl kuṟaivu ilamē. (IV–8–7)

Translation

I wouldn't need the bangles nice, disliked by the Lord,
Lustrous like the blue gem, who the discus flamboyant holds,
Who, as 'Ari' the Man-Lion of mounting radiance, emerged with rage
And gladly split the broad chest of Iraṇiyaṉ, of prowess great.

Notes

(i) The Lord, who emerged as Narasimha, the effulgent Man-Lion, split into two, the powerful Hiraṇyā's broad chest and rejoiced that He had destroyed the enemy of Prahlāda, His great devotee. The only weapons, He then used, were His sharp nails. The boons which had fortified the demon, virtually served as the feed for his gigantic strength of formidable proportions and yet it could hardly appease half the hunger of Narasimha's nails. The ferocious Man-Lion's formidable appearance with open mouth, tongue protruding over the lip, clenched fist, ready for the knock and tumultuous ejaculations, reduced Hiraṇya to the sad plight of a roasted pig and the Lord tore him off effortlessly. The discus and the other weapons of the Lord should have obviously been flaming with rage that they could not be commissioned to share the spoils in the peculiar context of slaying the demon, armed with special boons of a bewildering variety.

(ii) The Nāyakī laments that she hardly needs to be bedecked, when He, who came to the aid of Prahlāda, the young lad whose very father had turned terribly hostile to him, would not succour her, who also pines for His patronage. (Iṭu)

vari vaḷaiyāl kuṟaivu illāp peru muḻakkāl aṭaṅkārai
eri aḻalam puka ūti, iru nilam muṉ tuyar tavirtta,
terivu ariya civaṉ, piramaṉ, amarar-kōṉ, paṇintu ēttum
viri pukaḻāṉ kavarāta mēkalaiyāl kuṟaivu ilamē. (IV–8–8)

Translation

I needn't the garments which attract not
My Lord of fame far-flung, who rid the Earth vast
Of its burden heavy and did in the enemies kindle
The fire of mounting fright when He blew the conch spiral,
Adored by Civaṉ, Piramaṉ, Amararkōṉ and other Celestials.

Note

When Lord Kṛṣṇa blew 'Pāñcajanya', His conch, on the battlefield, it instantly unnerved all His enemies. On the other hand, it warmed up the ardent devotees. Rukmiṇi was in such a forlorn state, after her betroth l to Śiśupāla, that she was on the very verge of collapse and it was the heartening sound from Śrī Kṛṣṇa's conch, from an ambush nearby, that revived her. When the severed head of an illusory Rāma was exhibited before Sītā, in Aśoka Vana, it was the sound from Śrī Rāma's bow-string on the battlefield that disillusioned her and put her at ease. Parāśara Bhaṭṭar would say that Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī naturally pined for similar relief as she was also one like Sītā and Rukmiṇi.

mēkalaiyāl kuṟaivu illā, meḻivu uṟṟa akal alkul
pōkamakaḷ pukaḻt tantai viṟal vāṇaṉ puyam tuṇittu,
nākamicait tuyilvāṉpōl, ulaku ellām naṉku oṭuṅka
yōku aṇaivāṉ kavarāta uṭampiṉāl kuṟaivu ilamē. (IV–8–9)

Translation

We have no need for this body disliked by the Lord,
Who seems asleep on the bosom of (Ādiśeṣa) the serpent
But thinks out ways and means of the worlds' betterment,
Who the sturdy shoulders severed of Vāṇaṉ, the redoubted
Father of (Uṣā) the young lady of supple grace
And ravishing beauty, with plenty of garments nice.

Note

If Bāṇāsura's life was spared by the Lord, it was only out of consideration for Uṣā, that she shall not be orphaned. The Nāyakī naturally feels that the Lord does not extend

a similar care in her case and if her body holds out no charm for Him, it hardly deserves to be relished by her.

uṭampiṉāl kuṟaivu illā uyir pirinta malaittuṇṭam
kiṭantaṉapōl, tuṇi palavā, acurar kuḷām tuṇittu, ukanta,
taṭam puṉala caṭaimuṭiyaṉ taṉi orukūṟu amarntu uṟaiyum
uṭampu uṭaiyāṉ kavarāta uyiriṉāl kuṟaivu ilamē. (IV–8–10)

Translation

My Soul I can hardly love if it repels the Lord,
Who into bits many did split the hefty Asura hordes
And complacent feel, on whose body huge does reside
Śiva, bearing the cool waters (of Gaṅgā) on matted locks.

Note

The essential nature of the Soul is to subserve the Lord but if He doesn't like to take service from it, it just doesn't deserve to exist. The immortality of the Soul is not to be brought in here and the point at issue confused. What is emphasised here is that things which are not linked up with God, are as good as non-existent. The Nāyakī is indeed vexed that the Lord who has allotted a portion of His body even to Śiva whose ego often times gets bloated and makes him feel that he is the Supreme, does not oblige her likewise. It is a pity that the Lord who destroyed all the evil forces out of loving condescension for the welfare of His devotees, should be indifferent to the Nāyakī, who is as good as non-existent (asat), when not sustained by His loving attention.

uyiriṉāl kuṟaivu illā ulaku ēḻ taṉṉuḷ oṭukki
tayir veṇṇey uṇṭāṉait taṭam kurukūrc caṭakōpaṉ
ceyir il col icaimālai āyirattuḷ ip pattāl
vayiram cēr piṟappu aṟuttu, vaikuntam naṇṇuvarē. (IV–8–11)

Translation

Those that chant these songs ten
Out of the thousand, flawless and mellifluous, of Caṭakōpaṉ,
Adoring the Lord, Who did in Him compress and sustain
The souls innumerable and their worlds seven

And then ate up the curds and butter (as child Divine),
Will have their chronic cycle of birth and death ended
And attain Vaikuṇṭam (the high heaven)

Note

Unlike the worshipper at the sanctum, remaining worried about the safety of the pair of sandals left by him at the temple gate, the Lord attended to His cosmic duties first, such as the sustenance of the worlds and their contents in His stomach during the deluge, and then addressed Himself to the task of eating up the curds and butter in the pastoral village of Gokula, with no let or hindrance from other quarters. Even as pregnant women get extra-nourishment, the Lord, holding in His stomach all things and beings, had all the nourishment He could have in Gokula.

Fourth Centum—Ninth Decad (IV-9)
(Naṇṇātār Muṟuvalippa)

Preamble

In the last decad, the Āḻvār got terribly vexed with himself and his possessions and wanted to give up his body, life, that and the other. But, even for this kind of dissolution, he had to depend upon the Lord's help, as in the case of salvation. And so, he prays to the Lord to finish him off altogether. The Āḻvār's ardour in this respect is remarkable. His longing to get out of this world is due to (1) frequent interruptions in communion with the Lord and the resultant pangs of separation, (2) intolerance of contacts with the worldlings, straying away from Him and (3) the cruel impact of the five senses and the domineering sense-organs, with the serious risk of his straying back into the domain of the sensual pleasures.

In the last decad, we saw the Āḻvār's pangs of separation from the Lord; in VII-1, he dwells upon the cruel impact of the sense, while, in this decad, he displays his intolerance of living in the midst of the worldlings.

It would indeed be some consolation if the Āḻvār who had the misfortune of not being able to see God, lived at least in the midst of those who were not averse to seeing Him. But even this bit of solace, the Āḻvār felt, he was being denied, having to live in the midst of the worldlings, watching their scramble for food and raiment and their stupid pursuits after sensual pleasures, farther away from God. How then could he tolerate this agonising state of affairs? Did not Tirumaṅkai Āḻvār declare that he shall not think, even for a moment, about those who do not meditate on the Lord reclining on the seashore at the pilgrim centre, called 'Kaṭaṉmallai' in the Bay of Bengal? Conveying the same sentiment, in a slightly different manner, that Āḻvār also said that sweet were the moments when he didn't think of those miserable humans who would not cherish in their hearts the Lord enshrined at Tirukkaṇṇamaṅkai and bear His lovely feet on their heads. Vibhīṣaṇa abandoned Laṅkā and flew towards Rāma's camp on the other shore, determined to get out of the territory of Rāvaṇa, the heinous offender, whatever be the prospects of his (vibhīṣaṇa) admission into Rāma's camp. Saint Nammāḻvār would likewise want to get out of this wretched abode but even this could be got done only at the Lord's volition. Therefore it is, he appeals to Him, in this decad, in such moving terms as, 'pray, deign to take me unto Your feet expeditiously', 'Pray, hasten my death that I may unto Your feet attain', "when will you clear me out of this fortress and lift me unto Your feet in Heaven?" etc. Life in the midst of blazing fire is indeed preferable to staying in the company of the sinners who just do not know what it is to think of God.

The genesis of this decad is appreciated by Empār and Kūrattāḻvāṉ in two different ways. According to Empār, it is like this: The Āḻvār prays unto the Lord, "My Lord, I could, in a way, put up with my grief due to my separation from you. But it is very much beyond me to bear the misery of staying in the midst of the worldlings who do not reckon with you at all, and wallow in sex and sensuality; you would, therefore, do well to put an end to this kind of misery which can neither be cured nor endured and take me out of this abode".

Kūrattāḻvāṉ's elucidation is, however, as follows: The Āḻvār's attention turned on the world around in search of like-minded persons with whom he could share his grief due to separation from

God and secure some relief. But he found them all steeped in sensual pleasures, as intensely as he himself was in the realm of God-love and God enjoyment. This was, according to the Āḻvār, far more calamitous than his own privation and he, therefore, forgot his own misery, like unto a person stung by a scorpion not minding his own agony so much, when he sees another in greater distress, smitten by a sword. The Āḻvār, therefore, enters into a dialogue with the Lord and pleads for the redemption of the worldlings but the Lord asks the Āḻvār not to worry about them who are sense-buried, totally oblivious of Him and leave them to their fate. Thereupon, the Āḻvār insists that he should no longer be kept in their midst. The Lord, however, consoled the Āḻvār by pointing out to him that he was already on a pedestal of his own, unattached to the world. As a further concession, by way of curing the Āḻvār's grief caused by his looking at the world, the Lord revealed to him the glorious setting in Heaven where He is seen along with the Divine Mother, Lakṣmī, surrounded by the exalted Celestials. Beholding this heavenly splendour with great joy, the Āḻvār ends this decad on a jubilant note. Such an approach is only indicative of the melting tenderness of heart of Kūrattāḻvāṉ and his extraordinary solicitude for fellow-beings. It is said that once he saw, as he was passing along, a frog in the jaws of a snake, croaking piteously in agony. He sighed, "Alas! to whom does this frog appeal and who will hear it and come to its rescue?" and fainted.

naṇṇātār muṟuvalippa, nal uṟṟār karaintu ēṅka,
eṉ ārāt tuyar viḷaikkum ivai eṉṉa ulaku iyaṟkai!
kaṇṇāḷā! kaṭal kaṭaintāy! uṉa kaḻaṟkē varum paricu,
taṇṇāvātu aṭiyēṉaip paṇi kaṇṭāy, cāmāṟē. (IV–9–1)

Translation

Oh, what a world is this, which countless miseries breeds,
Where over one's privations, friends and relations do grieve
While the hostile ones do with joy immense chuckle!
Oh, merciful Lord who did the milk-ocean churn,
Pray hasten my end so that I do your feet attain.

Notes

The Āḻvār lays before the Lord two options, namely, curing the miseries of the worldlings or terminating his stay over

here. It is a fantastic world, without a correct perspective of good and bad things. When calamities befall a person, his friends and relations bemoan his lot while his foes rejoice, as if there is a festivity in their homes. This is indeed too much for the Āḻvār to bear.

The Āḻvār seems to suggest to the Lord who undertook all that trouble to churn the milk-ocean and deliver the nectar unto the selfish Devas, that He could also mend the ways of the world and cure them of their miseries. The Lord said, there was nothing He could do in the case of the worldlings who did not reckon with Him at all, and struck a divergent path. So then, the Āḻvār is pressing the other alternative, namely, cutting out the tenure of his stay here, like unto the one caught up in forest fire looking for water and shelter, the immediate needs.

cām āṟum, keṭum āṟum, tamar, uṟṟār talaittalaippeytu,
ēmāṟik kiṭantu, alaṟṟum ivai eṉṉa ulaku iyaṟkai!
ām āṟu oṉṟu aṟiyēṉ nāṉ; aravu-aṇaiyāy! ammāṉē!
kūmāṟē viraikaṇṭāy-aṭiyēṉaik kuṟikkoṇṭē. (IV–9–2)

Translation

My Sire, resting on serpent-bed, I shudder
How I can out of this mesh escape unhurt,
Pray call me quick unto your lovely feet;
Oh, what a world this is! death befalls all of a sudden
And people are beset with miseries umpteen,
Grief-stricken, the near ones do their lots bemoan,
Falling on each other, indeed a pathetic scene.

Notes

(i) The material world taints people to an alarming extent. They plan ahead for a long stay here but death suddenly overtakes them like the thunderbolt. They set much store by their so called possessions, and sink into grief, when they get dispossessed due to loss by fire, theft etc. They are so miserably addicted to lucre as to look upon their dear money as even more valuable than life. They look upon their earthly relations as all-in-all

and when they pass away, they cry out their hearts. Apprehending that continued stay in such a world might taint him also, the Āḻvār lustily pleads with the Lord to arrange for his early exist from this abode. In this land of nescience, the Āḻvār is probably the solitary Soul crying out for such emancipation, and the Āḻvār wants the Lord to take special note of it.

(ii) A striking illustration has been given in Īṭu, depicting the worldly men's morbid love of lucre. A man, accused of treason, had his legs and hands lopped off under the King's orders. However, when his friends came to condole with him in his dire misfortune, he took the initiative and asked them to congratulate him, rather than condole with him, for having been let off so lightly without being called upon to part with a portion of his dear money. The compassionate hearts of Saints like Nammāḻvār naturally deplore the fate of such men who pin all their faith on lucre, totally oblivious of God.

koṇṭāṭṭum, kulam puṉaivum, tamar, uṟṟār, viḻu nitiyum,
vaṇṭu ār pūṅ kuḻalāḷum, maṉai oḻiya, uyir māytal
kaṇṭu āṟṟēṉ ulaku iyaṟkai!–kaṭalvaṇṇā! aṭiyēṉaip
paṇṭēpōl karutātu, uṉ aṭikkē kūyp paṇikoḷḷē. (IV–9–3)

Translation

My Lord of oceanic hue, think not of this vassal as before,
Lift me up that I may serve right at your feet,
Endure I can't the trends of the world, any more;
Unto name and fame shoot up people overnight, these upstarts
Acquire home and hearth, the bride fair and all that,
But leaving them all behind, life suddenly departs.

Notes

(i) The Ācāryas who have delved deep into the śāstras and acquired a keen insight of Vedanta, the spiritual domain, are no less keen in their observation of the mechanics of the mundane world, as revealed by the commentary on this song. A fellow who was nobody till yesterday,

suddenly comes by a few chips and gets boosted by people around, waiting for a suitable opportunity to grab from him. The fellow of obscure origin and humble parentage, having risen to fortune, becomes vain and starts masquerading as one of high descent, under the cloak of his new-found wealth. Relations who would not acknowledge him earlier, throng round him now and openly parade their kinship with him. Fathers who would not even look at him and much less consider him as eligible for the hand of their daughters, now vie with each other in netting him. Our hero who has now amassed money which generally accumulates like the dried leaves dropped from the trees during autumn, also thinks it worthwhile to marry, although he is well beyond the borders of youth. The poor girl, his partner, still in her teens, falls an easy prey to the prying eyes of the greedy youngsters around. The home is jolly well there, built by our hero for him and his wife to live in privacy, but, leaving all these behind, he gives up his ghost one day all of a sudden. Oh, how pathetic! The Āḻvār doesn't want to stay in this abode any more, watching such harrowing scenes.

(ii) *Think not of this vassal as before*: As one Ciṟṟāḷkoṇṭār would put it, the Saint wants the Lord to note that his present appeal is not on a par with his earlier ones, being the offshoot of his mental agony over the calamitous ways of the world and the Lord should not, therefore, ignore his call even as people are prone to ignore the continual tittle-tattles of the newt (wall-lizard).

koḷ eṉṟu kiḷarntu eḻunta perum celvam neruppu āka,
koḷ eṉṟu tamam mūṭum; ivai eṉṉa ulaku iyaṟkai!
vaḷḷalē! maṇivaṇṇā! uṉa kaḻaṟkē varumparicu,
vaḷḷal ceytu aṭiyēṉai uṉatu aruḷāl vāṅkāyē. (IV–9–4)

Translation

Bounteous Lord of sapphire hue, may Your benevolent grace
On me alight and lift me up to Your feet!
How impudent is this world, in nescience steeped,

Madly after the riches elusive, which only gut
The whole lot like the fire well ablaze!

Notes

(i) Material wealth is a virtual man-killer, being open to the hazards of theft, arson and even murder, not to speak of the rank jealousy it kindles in the have-nots, friends and the relations and the disastrous results that follow. In short, the so-called earthly riches literally burn down the wielders, like fire which burns out whatever it gets hold of. The worldlings are fully aware of the potential harm of the riches and yet, truly characteristic of the 'tamas', darkness that envelops their minds, they do not profit by this knowledge but madly run after the mundane wealth and perish. Persistence in mistakes without profiting by the experience of their own and others is a fundamental characteristic of 'tamas' which dominates these unwary people, who would tumble, during nights, into the very pits which they had clearly seen by day.

(ii) It is indeed His unbounded generosity, that the Lord presents His exquisite Form of Sapphire hue!

vāṅku nīr malar ulakil niṟpaṉavum tirivaṉavum
āṅku uyirkaḷ piṟappu iṟappup piṇi mūppāl takarppuṇṇum
īṅku itaṉmēl vem narakam; ivai eṉṉa ulaku iyaṟkai!
vāṅku eṉai nī, maṇivaṇṇā! aṭiyēṉai maṟukkēlē. (IV–9–5)

Translation

Confound not this vassal, oh, gem-hued Lord,
Pray take me out of this sprawling world,
Which from the waters emerged, where all creatures,
Static and mobile, are seen screaming,
Ground by the wheel of birth, death, old age
And pestilence and going hence to hell to drudge.

Notes

(i) *Āḻvār to the Lord*: "Sire, are you keeping me on in this abode, just to witness and realise the harrowing depth

of the sufferings of the worldlings, tossed up between birth on one side, and death, on the other, and old age and pestilence, in between? and then there are the post-mortem sufferings in hell, far more severe. I pray Thee not to stir up my feelings any more, but to take me unto Thy feet without any further delay."

(ii) The frequent reference to the Gem hued Lord in these songs, emphasises the fact that the Āḻvār was weaned from the world, only when he came under the magic spell of His exquisite Form.

maṟukki, val valaippaṭutti, kumaittiṭṭu, koṉṟu uṇpar;
aṟapporuḷai aṟintu ōrār; ivai eṉṉa ulaku iyaṟkai!
veṟit tuḷava muṭiyāṉē! viṉaiyēṉai uṉakku aṭimai
aṟakkoṇṭāy; iṉi eṉ ār amutē! kūyaruḷāyē. (IV–9–6)

Translation

Oh, Lord, wearing on Your crown tuḷaci garland fragrant,
My perfect Nectar, You have as Your vassal enlisted
This sinner great and now I pray that You grant
Me a lift and clear me out of this place I detest,
Where men live by torturing others, immorality running rampant.

Note

It is indeed remarkable that Saint Nammāḻvār, seated in the hollow of a tamarined tree inside the temple, could televise, as it were, the happenings in the world around and lament, "oh, the ways of the world!" He deplores the unfair means by which people hoard lucre, throwing morals to the winds. Here is a typical example of the nefarious means by which people stuff their stomachs.

A poor, harmless soul, having a little bit of money, went to a village, thinking that he could live there in peace. The headman of the village, however, frightened the new-comer by telling him that the people around suspected him and might even harm him. Put in dread, the simple fellow succumbed to the artifice of the headman and entrusted all

money and land to the latter's custody. Lest the poor victim should, later on, make bold to demand his money and land, the headman got a document executed in his favour for a loan, not actually paid, and interest was made to accumulate thereon. Not stopping with all these machinations, the headman feared exposure of his infamy sometime or the other and, therefore, contrived to murder the poor fellow and thus did away with him altogether.

Little wonder then, the Saint deplored and detested such surroundings and longed to get away.

āyē! iv ulakattu niṟpaṉavum tirivaṉavum
nīyē; maṟṟu oru poruḷum iṉṟi nī niṉṟamaiyāl,
nōyē mūppu, iṟappu, piṟappu, piṇiyē eṉṟu ivai oḻiya,
kūyē koḷ aṭiyēṉai; koṭu ulakam kāṭṭēlē. (IV–9–7)

Translation

My Lord, all things in this world,
Still or mobile, are by you controlled;
I pray that this vassal be not shown
This wicked world but be shorn
Of birth, death, old age and pestilence
And lifted up to Your feet in high heavens.

Notes

(i) *Lord to the Āḻvār*: Why don't you try to get what you aspire for, without my interference?

(ii) *Āḻvār to the Lord*: Sire, not a tiny twig can move without Your aid. Having segregated me from the rest, as a legitimate aspirant for entry into heaven, why don't you release me from this world and make me a 'Mukta', the released soul in heaven, which You intend me to be?

kāṭṭi, nī karantu umiḻum nilam, nīr, tī, vicumpu, kāl
īṭṭi, nī vaittu amaitta imaiyōr vāḻ taṉi muṭṭaik
kōṭṭaiyiṉil kaḻittu, eṉṉai uṉ koḷum cōti uyaraттuk
kūṭṭu-ariya tiruvaṭikkaḷ eññāṉṟu kūṭṭutiyē. (IV–9–8)

Translation

My Lord, when will You take me unto Your feet
In the resplendent heaven, difficult to attain,
Pulling me out of this fortress the cosmic egg You did ordain
Out of the elements five, which for a time shone
Then got inside Your stomach and was then let out?

Notes

(i) The Lord tells the Āḷvār that He would certainly fulfil the Āḷvār's desire. The Āḷvār, however, wants to know when exactly He would do it. The Lord has to set a date for the Āḷvār's entry into heaven, even as Bharata was assured of Śrī Rāma's return from exile at the end of fourteen years.

(ii) Piḷḷai Tirunarayūr Araiyar is said to have observed that the net woven around each individual soul by the Almighty Lord, in the light of past Karma, has to be disentangled by Him alone, seeing that we are much-too-feeble and cannot disentangle even a bird's nest. It is a matter of common knowledge that the intricately woven bird's nest is neatly disentangled by the bird itself and man can, at best only destroy it, if ever he attempted to disentangle the nest. And so, He alone can undo this bondage of ours, and that He will do, when we clasp His holy feet.

kuṭṭuti niṉ kurai kaḻalkaḷ; imaiyōrum toḻāvakaiceytu,
āṭṭuti nī; aravu-aṇaiyāy! aṭiyēṉum aktu aṟivaṉ;
vēṭkai ellām viṭuttu eṉṉai uṉ tiruvaṭiyē cumantu uḻalak
kūṭṭu-ariya tiruvaṭikkaḷ kūṭṭiṉai-nāṉ kaṇṭēṉē. (IV–9–9)

Translation

Oh, Lord on serpent-bed, this vassal too knows your ways,
That unto your jingling feet you lift (those by you favoured)
While even (the exalted) Devas you just keep away;
Perceive do I, my craze for pleasures sensual you have destroyed

And me, unto your feet difficult to attain, you now admit
That I may on my head bear them and roam about.

Notes

(i) The Lord having revealed to the Āḷvār the glorious setting in Heaven, he rejoices.

(ii) Śrī Rāma gave to Bharata only a pair of wooden sandals. But the Lord has now made it possible for the Āḷvār to bear His very feet on his head, and move about. The Āḷvār's joy, therefore, knows no bounds. The observations made by the Āḷvār, in this song, about the Lord's ways are not based on hear-say but on his personal experience.

kaṇṭu, kēṭṭu, uṟṟu, mōntu, uṇṭu, uḻalum aiṅkaruvi
kaṇṭa iṉpam, terivu ariya aḷavu illāc ciṟṟiṉpam,
oṇ-toṭiyāḷ tirumakaḷum nīyumē nilāniṟpa,
kaṇṭa catir kaṇṭoḻintēṉ; aṭaintēṉ uṉ tiruvaṭiyē. (IV–9–10)

Translation

I beheld you, my Lord, in the glorious company
Of Tirumakaḷ, wearing on her wrist bangles lovely
And I abjured the pleasures lowly
Of the sense-organs five besides the Kaivalya state
Of bliss limitless, yet inferior and attained your feet.

Notes

(i) Besides the Lord and Lakṣmī, the Divine Consort, there are millions of 'Muktas' (Released Souls) and 'Nityas' (Eternal Heroes) in Heaven, in constant attendance on the Divine Couple. Reference to the Lord and the Divine Mother only, in this song, goes to show that all the other denizens of Heaven literally merge in the patronising love of the Divine Couple and do not require to be mentioned separately.

(ii) The bangles rest well on the wrists of the Divine Mother, as She is inseparably planted on His winsome chest, unlike the lady-love, separated from her love, who

thins down alarmingly and her wrists cannot, therefore, keep the bangles on. Beholding the Lord, in conjunction with the Divine Mother, the Āḻvār naturally pines for uninterrupted bliss of service unto the Couple, eschewing all else on both sides-the sensual pleasures over here and the limitless self-enjoyment (Kaivalya) on the yonder side.

tiruvaṭiyai, nāraṇaṉai, kēcavaṉai, parañcuṭarai,
tiruvaṭi cērvatu karuti, ceḻuṅ kurukūre caṭakōpaṉ
tiruvaṭimēl uraitta tamiḻ āyirattuḷ ip pattum
tiruvaṭiyē aṭaivikkum, tiruvaṭi cērntu oṉṟumiṉē. (IV–9–11)

Translation

These songs ten out of the thousand of Caṭakōpaṉ
Of fertile Kurukūr, adoring the lovely feet of Nāraṇaṉ,
The Lord Supreme, Kēcavaṉ, of splendour supreme,
In order to gain these feet, will lead the chanters on,
To those very feet; steadfast unto those feet do therefore remain.

Note

The Āḻvār exhorts the people of this world to keep on chanting this decad, as long as they stay in this abode, as that will ensure their attaining His feet in Heaven. Throughout this decad, the Āḻvār longed for the feet of the Lord and by merely chanting this decad, one can attain those very feet in Heaven and render uninterrupted service.

Fourth Centum—Tenth Decad (IV-10)
(Oṉṟum-tēvum, ulakum)

Preamble

The Āḻvār expressed his abhorrence of the ways of the world and lustily pleaded with the Lord, in the last decad, that he be removed at once from this infernal land. And yet, the Lord did not take him away but contrived to pacify him by exhibiting to him the heavenly splendour, right here, and to keep him on here. The

Lord's idea in doing so was to propagate, in this confounded world, the true knowledge about God-head, through the Āḻvār's hymns, *par-excellence*, shorn of doubts, discrepancies and deviations. The Āḻvār seems to have taken due note of the Lord's intentions; he preaches, in this decad, the Supremacy of Śrīman Nārāyaṇa (Viṣṇu) and tries to disabuse the people of their mistaken notions in this regard and wean them away from the propitiation of other deities. Of course, the Āḻvār has already dwelt on the Supremacy of Lord Viṣṇu, in I-1 and II-2, based on His ' Para ' (transcendent) and ' Vibhava ' (incarnate) aspects, respectively. And now, he establishes the Lord's Supremacy in His ' Arca ' (iconic) aspect and, for this purpose, he concentrates on the Lord, enshrined in Kurukūr itself, as He bears the name, ' Ādinātha ', the First Lord or Progenitor and it comes in handy to establish His Supremacy.

The Supreme Lord should obviously be the first cause of all things and beings. Who this One is can, however, be ascertained only from the Scriptures. Even without such a study, the Lord, in His ' *Arca* ' (Idol) Form, compels attention and makes one instinctively cognise Him, as the causeless Cause, the Primordial Lord. Some might say that Brhamā, Viṣṇu and Śiva are all, on a par, of equal eminence. Some others might hold that there is yet another Power, superior to these three, which should be revered as the Supreme. In stanza 72 of his ' Peria Tiruvantāti ', the Āḻvār corrects these misconceptions and avers that the lotus stalk which sprouted from the navel of Śrīmaṉ Nārāyaṇa (Viṣṇu), tells the true story. From this stalk emerged the four-headed Brahmā from whom Śiva, the five-headed, appeared and Śiva, in turn, gave rise to the six-headed Subramaṇya and so on, resulting in the many heads we see in the world.

In Cāndogya Upaniṣad, the text, ' *Sadeva Somya idamagra āsīth*' indicates 'sat' as the first Cause. In another Upaniṣad, the first Cause is indicated by the word ' Ātmā', in the text ' *Ātma vā ayameka evāgra āsīth*', while yet another upaniṣad employs the word ' Brahmā ' to indicate this, in the text ' *Brahmā vā idamekamevāgra āsīth*! While, in the above texts, the First Cause or the Ordainer of the Universe has been referred to, in such general terms as ' *sat* ', ' *Ātmā*' and ' *Brahmā* ', the text in Mahopaniṣad pin-points this Supreme Authority as Nārāyaṇa—' *Ekohavai Nārāyaṇa āsīth na Brahmā neśānaḥ*', that is, Nārāyaṇa was the only one then, when

Brahma, Īśāna and others were in the unevolved, subtle state. The Lord, Whose Supremacy is thus established only after such a herculean task as delving into the different texts of Vedāntas, is, however, easily accessible in Tirunakari (Kurukūr). The Āḻvār, therefore, calls upon people to worship the Lord in His iconic Form, right here, and be redeemed, instead of going adrift, running after lesser deities. Thus, this decad shakes off the stupor of the votaries of the minor deities and exhorts them to concentrate on the Supreme Lord, the one and only God.

There are very many persons, in this world, who are quite conversant with the scriptural texts in all their ramifications and yet, do not have a clear conviction as to who exactly is the Supreme Lord to whom they should owe undivided allegiance. These people, therefore, waver and bow unto a number of deities. The followers of Śri Rāmānujācārya, however, stand out in dire contrast to these so-called learned men, and have unflinching faith in the Supremacy of Viṣṇu (Śriman Nārāyaṇa), although they may not have any academic learning, as such, to their credit. This is, of course, due to the grace galore of Saint Nammāḻvār in bequeathing this decad to posterity, as Empār would put it. An illustration of this robust faith is given below.

Tripura Devi, the wife of Rājā Akaḷāṅkanāṭṭāḻvāṉ, in the holy fold of Śri Rāmānuja's faith, would not worship the idols of the minor Gods, although she was not quite literate. When asked to quote the authority supporting her conviction, the queen replied: 'I know no authority other than the dictates of Śri Rāmānuja, my Saviour. Should he command me so I would certainly worship even the deity guarding the north-east (Īśānya) point of the Compass, where our waste-water pots are kept".

oṉṟum-tēvum, ulakum, uyirum, maṟṟum yātum-illā
aṉṟu, nāṉmukaṉ-taṉṉoṭu tēvar ulakōṭu uyir paṭaittāṉ,
kuṉṟam pōl maṇi māṭam nīṭu tirukkurukūr-ataṉuḷ
niṉṟa ātippirāṉ niṟka, maṟṟait teyvam nāṭutirē? (IV–10–1)

Translation

Ye, folks, why do you run after other deities,
When in holy Kurukūr with towering castles
Is our Lord Āḻippirāṉ, unto one and all visible,
The Progenitor who created Brahmā and other Celestials,
The worlds, men and animals, when there was none of these?

Notes

(i) The Āḻvār deplores the fate of those who fail to worship Lord Ādinātha (Ātippirāṉ), the Supreme God, making Himself easily accessible to all, in Tirunakari (Kurukūr) and go past Him, in quest of lesser deities. This is just as absurd as a thirsty fellow trying hard to dig a well on the bank of Gaṅgā river, in order to quench his thirst, instead of drinking handfuls of the flowing water of Gaṅgā.

(ii) Creation is just the refunding into the gross state and assortment of the different entities as Devas, humans, etc., from the erstwhile subtle or unevolved state, when they could be hardly distinguished from inert matter and were as good as non-existent. (Īṭu)

nāṭi nīr vaṇaṅkum teyvamum, ummaiyum muṉ paṭaittāṉ,
vīṭu il cirp pukaḻ ātippirāṉ-avaṉ mēvi uṟai kōyil,
māṭa māḷikai cūḻntu aḻaku āya tirukkurukūr-ataṉaip
pāṭi, āṭi, paravic celmiṉkaḷ, pal ulakīr! parantē. (IV–10–2)

Translations

Ye, men of this diverse world, move about all over,
Dancing and singing the praise of lovely Kurukūr,
By stately mansions surrounded, where lovingly resides
Lord 'Ātippirāṉ' of traits, auspicious and abiding,
Who created both you and the deities you revere.

Notes

(i) In this song, the Āḻvār exhorts the people of all sorts to converge into Tirunakari (Kurukūr) from different directions in great jubilation, dancing and singing the praise of that pilgrim centre, even as people congregate in a festive mood at Srīraṅgam during the 'big festival' (Paṅkuṉi uttaram celebrations). The emphasis has now shifted from the Lord to the pilgrim centre where

He lovingly resides and even the different routes leading thereto. The Lord loves the pilgrim centres on Earth even better than His stay in Heaven, where His heart always pines for the teeming millions of His straying subjects down below. Such an attitude is His crowning trait and it does not alter the fact that Heaven is a land of unalloyed bliss. In the midst of all that bliss, His heart leaps towards the weaker sections elsewhere, because of His tender solicitude.

(ii) It is Lord Viṣṇu, the Supreme, that ushered in all the subjects, classified under different denominations and so, worshipping the lesser deities amounts to the worship of one section of the Lord's subjects, by another. The Āḷvār deprecates the men of this world running after these deities, searching for them, instead of searching for the Supreme Lord, as enjoined by the Scriptures, '*Sonveṣṭavyaḥ*'.

(iii) The Universal Father is the only Lord and all the others are His vassals. Whoever arrogate to themselves independence are veritable thieves. The lesser gods also are such thieves in as much as they gulp down the sacrificial food which should legitimately go to the Lord and when the sacrificers seek them with prayers for boons, they run away like thieves. These gods only rob from the sacrificers what is God's own and they have nothing which they can call their own and grant.

paranta teyvamum, pal ulakum paṭaittu, aṉṟu uṭaṉē viḷuṅki,
karantu, umiḻntu, kaṭantu, iṭantatu kaṇṭum teḷiyakillīr;
ciraṅkaḷāl amarar vaṇaṅkum tirukkurukūr-ataṉuḷ
paraṉ tiṟam aṉṟi, pal ulakīr! teyvum maṟṟu illai pēcumiṉē.
(IV–10–3)

Translation

There's no God other than the One who did create
The Universe vast, Devas and other denominations,
Kept them all within Him (during deluge) and then spat,
Who spanned the worlds in strides three and from the ocean
Pulled the Earth out; how is it you aren't clear yet,

Ye, men of this diverse world, You'd better speak out
If there is another beside the One by Devas revered
In lovely Kurukūr, bowing low their heads.

Note

The herculean tasks performed by the Lord Who created the worlds to protect them on different occasions, should be sufficient to dispel all doubts regarding His Supremacy. And yet, the worldlings are not clear-sighted, a distressing state of affairs indeed, according to the Āḷvār, the more so, when those very deities whom these people adore, come and worship the Lord in Kurukūr.

pēca niṉṟa civaṉukkum, piramaṉ-taṉakkum, piṟarkkum,
nāyakaṉ avaṉē; kapāla nal mōkkattuk kaṇṭukoṇmiṉ;
tēca mā matiḷ cūḻntu, aḻaku āya tirukkurukūr-ataṉuḷ
īcaṉpāl ōr avam paṟaital eṉ āvatu iliṅkiyarkkē? (IV–10–4)

Translation

What use is it to the votaries of Iliṅkam, who take
Their stand (on mere inference) and heresies talk
About the Lord, in lovely Kurukūr enshrined,
With smart and stately walls around?
Learn, ye, men, who talk of Civaṉ as God Supreme,
From the way the skull in his hand was redeemed
That He (Nārāyaṇa) is unto him, Brahmā and others, the Lord Supreme

Notes

(i) Those who determine the Supremacy of God, purely on the basis of inference, as well as those who assert the Supremacy of Śiva (*Iliṅkam*) and Brahmā, are disabused of their wrong notions by this song. Basing their stand on certain texts, in isolation, some people affirm the Supremacy of Śiva and some others look upon Brahmā, as the Supreme. There are, however, various other texts establishing the Supremacy of Viṣṇu, Relying on these numerous texts, Saint Nammāḻvār has clarified the position here and asserted the overlordship of Viṣṇu.

(ii) The five-headed Siva, born of the five-headed Brahmā, abhorred the similarity between him and his sire and, in an uncontrollable moment, plucked out one of Brahmā's heads, by way of removing the vexatious parity. The skull of the Father, however, stuck fast to the Son's palm. On the advice of the Sages and Devas, Śiva went a-begging. The skull would not drop out, unless it was filled with the alms and unfortunately, it was never full. It was only when he went to Badrināth and appealed to Lord Nārāyaṇa that He gave alms, uttering the word 'akṣayaṁ' (plenty) and instantly, the skull got completely filled up and dropped out of Śiva's palm. Surely, neither the chopper nor the chopped could be the Supreme God.

iliṅkattu iṭṭa purāṇattīrum, camaṇarum, cākkiyarum,
valintu vātu ceyvīrkaḷum, maṟṟum num teyvamum āki niṉṟāṉ,
malintu cennel kavari vīcum tirukkurukūr-ataṉuḷ
polintu niṉṟa pirāṉ kaṇṭir-oṉṟum poy illai, pōṟṟumiṉē.
(IV–10–5)

Translation

Ye, hardened perverts, led away by stories about Iliṅkam,
Jains, Buddhists, heretics, one and all! you see, the Lord Supreme,
Internal Controller of you and your deities, Polintuniṉṟapirāṉ does gleam
In Tirukkurukūr with paddy fields rich, better worship Him,
There isn't any untruth whatever in what I proclaim.

Notes

(i) Addressing the aliens and heretics, the Āḻvār sums up beautifully the quintessence of the vedic texts and purāṇik teachings, other than those pertaining to the 'Rājasik' and 'tāmasik' varieties. He affirms that his addressees and the deities they revere (Agni, Śiva, Brahmā etc). are all controlled by Lord Viṣṇu, as the Supreme Controller, seated inside one and all. Unlike 'Liṅga Purāṇa' and other Purāṇas, which treat of the origin and prowess of particular deities and are prone,

in the particular context, to exaggerate the importance of those demi-gods, Śri Viṣṇu Purāṇa says, in reply to a general question as to who is the Supreme God who brings into being all things and lives and finally dissolves them, that Viṣṇu controls all the three functions of creation, sustentation and dissolution. And this Supreme Lord, the Āḻvār now points out, is right here in Kurukūr, in His Arca (iconic) manifestation, wherein all His superlative excellences converge in a perfect measure as His name, 'Polintu niṉṟa pirāṉ' connotes. This being the dark land of nescience, His great qualities shine here far better than in Heaven, where it is all day and no night, that is, all light and no darkness.

The Āḻvār avers that what he says is perfectly true, as there is no need for him to import greatness to the Lord Who is greatness itself unlike the demi-gods who need special boosting to prop them up.

pōṟṟi maṟṟu ōr teyvam pēṇap puṟattiṭṭu, ummai iṉṉē
tēṟṟi vaittatu, ellīrum vīṭu peṟṟāl ulaku illai eṉṟē;
cēṟṟil cennel kamalam ōṅku tirukkurukūr-ataṉuḷ
āṟṟa vallavaṉ māyam kaṇṭir-atu aṟintu aṟintu ōṭumiṉē.
(IV–10–6)

Translation

Know, ye, men adoring the lesser deities,
'Tis your past *Karma* that has kept you in this state,
Away from the goal of emancipation, under śāstraic restraint;
Better realise you can this ocean of *māya* ford
Only if you can get hold of the Almighty Lord
Who resides in Tirukkurukūr with fields fertile and lotus ponds fine,
And knowing this, do unto His feet hasten.

Note

To a question supposed to have been put to the Āḻvār by the votaries of minor deities, as to why Śrīman Nārāyaṇa, declared by him, in so many ways as the Supreme Lord, did not bend them towards Him, instead of allowing them to drift in the manner they were doing, adoring the lesser gods,

this song provides the answer. It is because of the heavy sins committed by them in the past that they have been tied down to their present lot of worshipping lesser deities, with the result that their emancipation from the dreadful cycle of birth and death and attaining Heaven have also been put off. Their hopes of redemption, therefore lie only in taking refuge at the feet of the Supreme Lord in His worshippable Form in Kurukūr. c.f. the Lord's statement in Bhagavad Gītā, (VII-14) that only those who take refuge in Him, cross beyond this 'māyā', prakriti which helps their liberation instead of hindering it by concealing His real nature, as it does, in the case of the non-seekers of His grace.

ōṭi ōṭi, pala piṟappum piṟantu, maṟṟu ōr teyvam
pāṭi āṭip paṇintu, palpaṭikāl vaḻi ēṟik kaṇṭīr–
kūṭi vāṉavar ētta niṉṟa tirukkurukūr-ataṉuḷ
āṭu puḷ-koṭi āti mūrttikku aṭimaipukuvatuvē. (IV-10-7)

Translation

Serve you did for ages and in many ways,
The lesser gods, passing thro' several gates of birth,
Well have you seen the extent of their so-called grace;
Better seek refuge at the feet of Lord Ātināta,
With the bird (Garuḍa) on His banner, enshrined in Kurukūr,
For Devas, in their strength, to come and revere.

Notes

(i) The text, "Brahmāṇaṃ Śitikaṇṭañ ca yās cānyā Devatāḥ smrutāḥ, pratibuddhā na sevante yasmāt parimitaṃ phalam" says that knowledgeable persons do not worship Brahmā, Śiva and other lesser deities, as the benefits derived thereby are much-too-slender and limited. The Āḻvār, therefore, exhorts people to seek refuge in Lord Ātinātha, in lovely Kurukūr. The very fact that these people have been worshipping the godlings in myriads of ways through countless births and have still not been able to get rid of the dreadful cycle of birth and rebirth, shows that these deities could do precious little for their emancipation. What is even

more noteworthy is that those very deities throng round the Lord, enshrined in Kurukūr and sing His praise to their hearts' content.

(ii) Actually, these deities derive all their power from Lord Viṣṇu, the Supreme Lord, see also I-1-5; again, in spite of their internal bickerings, these deities join together in the face of a common danger and propitiate the Lord, in a body. The Āḻvār, therefore, advises his addressees to seek refuge at the Lord's feet with immovable faith. In his scintillating commentary, Nampiḷḷai cites, as examples of such robust faith, king Ambarīṣa and Saint Tirumaḻicai Āḻvār.

In order to test Ambarīṣa's steadfastness the Lord appeared before the King, disguised as Indra, mounted on Airāvata, the white elephant (which again was but Garuḍa, the Lord's mount, in disguise) and offered to grant him boons. Pat came the King's admonition, as follows:

"Who are you and what is this insect you have brought with you? Don't you know that I am votary of Lord viṣṇu from whom all of you derive your position and authority. Surely, I am not the one who would pay homage to strollers like you, passing along the streets. May it please you to depart from here".

Saint Tirumaḻicai Āḻvār (BC 4202) was sitting with his legs stretched, stitching his torn-out garments, when Śiva and Pārvati passed by. The Āḻvār's nonchalance, unmindful of the presence of the exalted couple, provoked Pārvati and, at her insistence, an indignant Śiva demanded the Āḻvār's explanation for his disrespectful behaviour. Calm and unruffled, the Āḻvār queried whether the distinguished visitor could grant him salvation (mokṣa) but the latter said, "No, it is beyond my jurisdiction; it can be attained only by resorting to Viṣṇu". The considerate Āḻvār, thereupon asked Śiva whether he could postpone the death of creatures, at least by a day. On his betraying his helplessness once again, the Āḻvār jeeringly asked the visitor to decree

that the thread, the former was holding, did follow the needle as he was sewing. Unable to brook this insult, Śiva opened up the third eye on his forehead but the Saint overpowered it by pointing to the innumerable such eyes in his leg.

(iii) There is yet another anecdote, cited in Īṭu commentary, to illustrate the certainty of salvation through oneness of faith in the Supreme Lord.

When Śri Parāśara Bhaṭṭar was once reading that portion of Viṣṇu Purāṇa, dealing with the life of the meritorious King Yayāti whom Indra conspired to pull down apprehensive of the usurpation of his own position, two of the listeners, Piḷḷai Viḷupparaiyar and Appāṉ Tiruvaḷuntur Araiyar asked the learned discourser about the chief lesson to be learnt from the life-story of king Yayāti. Bhaṭṭarya elucidated: " Here is the lesson; the lesser gods, when propitiated, grant men their desires, but, side by side, envy rankles in the hearts of the former over the latter's mounting stature and they seek an opportunity to pull the votaries down, to prevent their drawing level with those very gods. On the other hand, Lord Viṣṇu looks upon His creatures' happiness as His own and He can never be swayed by such base passions as the lesser gods. One should not, therefore, resort to lesser gods but place all one's faith in the Supreme Lord ".

(iv) Bhaṭṭārya also cited the example of Lord Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa serving Sage Viśvāmitra as his humble servants. On being questioned at this stage how the Yādhavas came to grief, in spite of their close association with Lord Kṛṣṇa, Bhattārya pointed out that the Yādhavas had to share the fate they did, because of their irreclaimable ways, although Lord Kṛṣṇa did His very best for them, such as bringing from Kubera, the God of wealth, Treasures such as Śanka nidhi' and ' Padma nidhi '. Further, they looked upon Kṛṣṇa, not as God but as a mere kinsman, companion and so on, an ephemeral passing relationship which automatically lapsed at the end of their lives.

pukku aṭimaiyiṉāl taṉṉaik kaṇṭa mārkkaṇṭēyaṉ-avaṉai
nakka pirāṉum aṉṟu uyyakkoṇṭatu nārāyaṇaṉ aruḷē;
kokku alar taṭam tāḷai vēlit tirukkurukūr-ataṉuḷ
mikka ātippirāṉ niṟka, maṟṟait teyvam viḷamputirē. (IV-10-8)

Translation

'Tis the grace of Nārāyaṇaṉ Whom Nakkapirāṉ (Śiva) did invoke
That succoured Mārkkaṇṭēyaṉ (from Yama's yoke)
And made the latter peep into His stomach and have a look
(At Śiva) inside; the Lord Supreme now stands enshrined
As Ātippirāṉ, in Kurukūr with lovely hedges, white as the crane;
Why then do you at all about other deities mention?

Note

Some persons would appear to have objected to the Āḷvār under-rating Śiva, despite his fame as Mārkaṇṭēya's Saviour, who successfully resisted Yama's attempt to take away the devotee's life, at the tender age of sixteen. The Āḷvār now disabuses them of their wrong notions about that episode by giving them the correct perspective in this regard. Sage Mṛkaṇḍu's ardent prayers for the grant of a son were heard by Brahmā who, however, asked the Sage to opt for either a son, deformed and devilish, with a long life or one brilliant and beautiful, but short-lived, his term of life not extending beyond sixteen years. The Sage having indicated his preference to a son of the latter category, he was gifted with the gem of a son, Mārkaṇḍeya. As the little lad was approaching the end of his brief tenure of life, the parents were throbbing with painful anguish. The young one, however, placated them by asserting that he could surely overcome the ordeal through the good offices of Śiva whom he worshipping intensely. At the zero hour, when the boy completed sixteen years of age, Yama's hordes came down to snatch him away but the aura of his piety for Śiva was such that they could not get anywhere near him. They went and reported this strange phenomenon to their boss who sent his Minister Kālaṉ who fared no better. The

infuriated Yama himself came and threw his life-snatching cord along, which, however, encircled the idol of Śiva also, Mārkaṇḍeya was then embracing tight. Śiva meditated on Śrīman Nārāyaṇa and with His grace, he emerged forth from inside the idol, kicked yama out and blessed Mārkaṇḍeya with perpetual life and perennial youth. Although the superficial reader takes it that it was Śiva who rescued Mārkaṇḍeya from Yama's clutches, the truth of the matter is that it was Śrīman Nārāyaṇa, as the Supreme Lord and Internal Controller of Śiva, among others, who did the job, as narrated by Mārkaṇḍeya himself to Yudhiṣṭira, (see Maha Bhārata, Āraṇya Parva, chapter 192* that he (Mārkaṇḍeya) sought refuge in Śrīman Nārāyaṇa. This is also corroborated by the eighth chapter of the twelfth skanda of Śrī Bhāgavata which clearly says† that by propitiating Śrīman Nārāyaṇa, Mārkaṇḍeya defied Yama and conquered death.

As a matter of fact, Śiva who was immensely pleased with Mārkaṇḍeya's devotion, wanted to reward him suitably and, therefore, put him on to Śrīman Nārāyaṇa, Whom he (Śiva) himself was worshipping. Mārkaṇḍeya, blessed with immortality, prayed intensely to Śrīman Nārāyaṇa that he might be allowed to witness the Deluge (Mahāpralaya). Swimming across the vast expanse of water, he could not merely have access to the Lord reclining, as a mere babe, on a tender fig-leaf afloat but he was also allowed to peep inside the Lord's stomach. Seeing inside the Lord's stomach, one and all, including Śiva, whom he had been worshipping for long, Mārkaṇḍeya had no longer any doubts about Śrīman Nārāyaṇa's Supremacy. He took refuge in Him and was admitted by the Lord unto His fold.

viḷampum āṟu camayamum, avaiākiyum maṟṟum taṉpāl
aḷantu kāṇṭaṟku ariyaṉ ākiya ātippirāṉ amarum
vaḷam koḷ taṇ paṇai cūḻntu aḻaku āya tirukkurukūr-ataṉai
uḷam koḷ ñāṉattu vaimmiṉ-ummai uyyakkoṇṭu pōkuṟilē.
(IV–10–9)

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* Pitrubhaktosi Viprarṣe ! māñcaiva śaraṇaṁ gataḥ.

† Ārādhayan Hṛṣikeśaṁ jigye mṛtyuṁ sudurjayam.

Translation

Neither the aliens preaching their systems six
Nor the heretics can by-any-means fix
And measure the glory of 'Āḻippirāṉ' the Primordial Lord,
Who, in fertile Kurukūr, cool and lovely, has His abode;
Better keep Him for ever in your mind firmly lodged
If you are keen on your salvation indeed.

Note

The aliens are those who do not admit the authority of the Vedas and the Śāstras expounding them. The six systems of such aliens are: 'Śākhya' (Buddhists), 'ulukya' (Cārvākas), 'Kṣapaṇa' (Jains), 'Akṣapādā' (Naiyāyikas), 'Kapila' and 'Patanjali'. And then, there are those perverts or heretics who admit the authority of the Vedas but not in their entirety. They also misinterpret the texts and say that God has no form and no attributes, reducing Him to the position of a vast wilderness, mere icy abstract, cold and colourless. Both the aliens and the heretics are thus bungling in their own ways. These people cannot, therefore, comprehend the Lord's cosmic wealth and gauge the extent of His glory, which is unfathomable and unlimited.

uṟuvatu āvatu-et tēvum ev ulakaṅkaḷum maṟṟum taṉpāl
maṟu il mūrttiyōṭu ottu ittaṉaiyum niṉṟavaṇṇam niṟkavē,
ceṟuvil cennel karumpoṭu ōṅku tirukkurukūr-ataṉuḷ
kuṟiya māṇ uru ākiya nīḷ kuṭak kūttaṉukku āḷ-ceyvatē.
(IV–10–10)

Translation

'Tis but meet that you should serve the immaculate Lord
Whose bodies, the Devas all, the worlds many and all else are,
Who did as the celebrated midget (Vāmana) descend
As well as (Kaṇṇaṉ), the pot-dancer grand
And now in Tirukkurukūr, in full splendour stands,
Amid bumper sugarcane crops and rich paddy fields.

Note

Indra, Candra, Kubera and all other Devas as well as all the worlds, with their contents, sentient and non-sentient, are like unto the Lord's bodies, directed, controlled and sup-

ported by Him. That Lord resides in Kurukūr (Āḷvār-Tirunakari), in unabated splendour. The Āḷvār, therefore, calls upon people to come and worship this Lord, going by the name of 'Ātinātan' standing firmly in Kurukūr and get redeemed.

āḷ-ceytu āḷip pirāṉaic cērntavaṉ, vaṉ kurukūrnakarāṉ,
nāḷ-kamaḷ makiḷ mālai mārpiṉaṉ, māṟaṉ, caṭakōpaṉ
vēṭkaiyāl coṉṉa pāṭal āyirattuḷ ip pattum vallār
mīṭci iṉṟi vaikunta mānakar maṟṟatu kaiyatuvē. (IV-10-11)

Translation

Those that can recite these songs ten,
Out of the thousand sung with deep devotion
By Kurukūr Caṭakōpaṉ, wearing on his chest,
The fragrant narcissus garland and blest
By the Lord donning the discus, to render Him service grand,
By turning unto God the wayward worldlings,
Are assured of the eternal Kingdom in Heaven.

Notes

(i) In the original text of this song, it has been said that the Āḷvār attained the Lord donning the discus, through service. The finale is, however, yet to come and he has to wait till X-10. The service rendered by the Āḷvār by hymning the Lord's peerless glory and clearly establishing His Supremacy, in this decad, is unique. The votaries of the minor gods have been weaned away, *en masse*, through the Āḷvār's grand exposition, in this decad and all of them have become ardent followers of Viṣṇu, a great feat indeed, not achieved even by the Almighty Lord.

(ii) Saint Nammāḷvār, known in sanskrit parlance as Vakulābharaṇa, is said to have been wearing the narcissus garland with perennial fragrance. Śrī Vedānta Deśika has said in his 'Yatirāja-Saptathi' that the fragrance of the narcissus permeates 'Tiruvāymoḷi' (Dramiḍa Veda) as well, whereas such an exhilarating fragrance cannot be found in the Sanskrit Vedas which are indee the poorer for it.

THE CENTUM, IN RETROSPECT (DECAD-WISE SUMMARY)

(IV-1) : The Āḷvār's tender solicitude and irrepressible fellow-feeling induce him to turn his attention to the world once again and that too, so soon after his repulsion in III-9. *In the opening decad of this Centum*, the straying subjects are called upon by him to eschew the so-called material wealth, much-too-flimsy and fleeting, and realise the importance of holding on to the Supreme Lord, the wealth Supreme and everlasting, unlike the earthly monarchs who once held supreme away, being ground to mere bits of dust and reduced to abject beggary in one and the same span of life;

(IV-2) : The Āḷvār's advice, as in the first decad, to an unresponsive world has only served to excite his own God-love to such an extent that he longs for the 'tuḷaci' (basil leaves) worn on the Lord's feet, during His Avatāras, in the days gone-by and feels frustrated due to the immediate non-fulfilment of his aspiration by the Lord. The Āḷvār becomes insensate, like a female forsaken by her lover after their erstwhile union and the gnostic mother steps in to describe the critical condition of her daughter (Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī), as *in the second decad*. It is, however, clear from the end-song of this decad that the Lord did, at last, oblige the Āḷvār and regale him;

(IV-3) : Time being at the beck and call of the Supreme Lord, He could certainly fulfil the aspiration of the Āḷvār, as in the second decad, and regale Him. *In the third decad*, a fully satisfied Āḷvār gives expression to his immense joy over the unique blending of his soul with the Lord, with perfect reciprocity of connubial love;

(IV-4) : Apprehending that overwhelming divine ecstasy, as in the third decad, might jeopardise the Āḷvār's very existence, the Lord reduced the tempo a little, just to stabilise the Āḷvār's God-enjoyment. Even this upsets the Āḷvār, whom we see, *in the fourth decad*, transformed once again, as the Nāyakī (female lover), in a state of heavy depression. She runs after the objects bearing the likeness of the Lord in one respect or another but disenchantment, on nearer approach, makes her sweat with disappointment and wither down. The gnostic mother steps in and relates the pitiable condition of her love-smitten daughter and the words she utters. The merciful Lord, however, presents Himself before the Āḷvār towards the end of this decad and puts the Āḷvār back on his feet·

(IV-5) : Visualising, right from where he is, the Lord's cosmic wealth and splendour, the Āḷvār sings, *in the fifth decad*, with cymbals in hand, the Lord's glory to his heart's fill and goes into raptures. It seems as though the Lord had called upon the Āḷvār to sing His glory so that it can acquire special lustre through his laudation. (*The spiritual vicissitudes of the Āḷvār, alternating between satiate and disconsolate states are studiously engineered by the Lord, in order to enrich and intensify the Āḷvār's God-love and stabilise his God-enjoyment, by stages*);

(IV-6) : *In the sixth decad,* we see the Āḻvār, once again consigned to the bottom-most depths of dejection, transformed (figuratively) as a Nāyakī, insensate and thus unable to speak out her woes, the Lord having once more withdrawn Himself from the Āḻvār's mental vision. It is the Nāyakī's mate, who speaks out in this decad, extremely critical that she is of the wrong steps taken by the elders around, such as propitiation of minor deities with meat and liquor, to cure the Nāyakī of her strange malady, misled by a female gipsy whom they had approached for divining the cause of the malady. The recipe strongly suggested by the mate who vehemently condemned the activities of the elders, is that the holy names of Lord Viṣṇu be uttered in the Nāyakī's hearing besides sprinkling on her the dust collected from the feet of the Lord's pious devotees;

(IV-7) : As the holy names of the Lord trickled down his ears, the Āḻvār regained consciousness but kept pondering how the Lord, the friend-in-need, capable of dispensing the appropriate remedies, could keep away from him. Unable to stand the separation from the Lord, the Āḻvār cries out his heart, *in the seventh decad,* so lustily that it melts down even the stony hearts of his listeners;

(IV-8) : Continuing in the feminine state, the frustrated Āḻvār laments *in the eighth decad,* that neither he nor his possessions (bangles, garments, complexion etc.) deserved to exist, so long as he was not in the good books of the Lord, as evidenced by the absence of response to his passionate appeal, as in the seventh decad;

(IV-9) : *In the ninth decad,* the Āḻvār displays his intolerance of living in the midst of the worldlings, with their stupid pursuits, straying away from Him, with the serious risk of his straying back into the domain of the sensual pleasures, under the cruel impact of the five senses and the domineering sense-organs. As in the case of salvation, the Āḻvār has to depend upon the Lord even for this kind of dissolution and hence his dialogue with the Lord, as in this decad, to get him removed from the wretched surroundings;

(IV-10) : Having already dwelt on the Supremacy of Lord Viṣṇu, in His 'Para' (transcendent) and 'Vibhava' (Incarnate) aspects, in I-1 and II-2 respectively, the Āḻvār proceeds, *in the concluding decad of this centum,* to establish His supremacy, in His Arca (Iconic) manifestation, as well. For this purpose, the Āḻvār concentrates on Lord Ātinātha, the First Lord or Progenitor, enshrined in Kurukūr, the Āḻvār's birth-place, whose exquisite Form compels attention and makes one instinctively cognise Him as the Supreme Lord, the causeless Cause, the Primordial One. The Āḻvār calls upon people to worship the Lord in His iconic Form, right here and be redeemed of their age-long sins, instead of going adrift, running after lesser deities. Thus, this decad shakes off the stupor of the votaries of the minor deities and exhorts them to concentrate on the Supreme God, the one and only God.

BOOK V

Fifth Centum—First Decad (V-1) (Kai ār Cakkarattu)

Preamble

Through his brilliant exposition of the Lord's Supremacy, in the last decad, the Āḻvār could wean away the worldlings from propitiating the minor deities and turn their attention to the Supreme Lord (Viṣṇu). The Āḻvār is about to sing the song of benediction for the new state of affairs to flourish in all its glory, vide V-2. Meanwhile, he draws the searchlight inwards to examine the root-cause of the extraordinary grace showered on him by the Lord, whereby he could not merely stand apart from the worldlings without wallowing as one of them, but also advise and correct them. This introspection, however, reveals that even for a mere show of piety by him devoid of genuine love for God, He has condescended to open up the floodgates of His grace on him, without caring in the least to go beneath the skin and expose his hollowness. The Āḻvār just marvels at the Lord's overwhelming grace and gives vent to his wonderment, in this decad.

kai ār cakkarattu eṉ karumāṇikkamē! eṉṟu eṉṟu,
poyyē kaimmai colli, puṟamē puṟamē āṭi,
meyyē peṟṟoḻintēṉ; viti vāykkiṉṟu kāppār ār?
aiyō! kaṇṇa-pirāṉ! aṟaiyō iṉip pōṉālē! (V-1-1)

Translation

Still engrossed with pleasures sensual, I did sham
Love unto you and called you out many a time,
As my Lord of sapphire hue, holding the discus majestic and so on,
And yet, you did your grace on this imposter rain
As if I am genuine; ha! who can its influx resist?
Oh, Kaṇṇapirāṉ. You can't from me part hence, even if you insist.

Note

No doubt, the effulgent discus in the Lord's exquisite hand and His sapphire hue are very attractive and can easily steal

(IV-6) : *In the sixth decad,* we see the Āḻvār, once again consigned to the bottom-most depths of dejection, transformed (figuratively) as a Nāyakī, insensate and thus unable to speak out her woes, the Lord having once more withdrawn Himself from the Āḻvār's mental vision. It is the Nāyakī's mate, who speaks out in this decad, extremely critical that she is of the wrong steps taken by the elders around, such as propitiation of minor deities with meat and liquor, to cure the Nāyakī of her strange malady, misled by a female gipsy whom they had approached for divining the cause of the malady. The recipe strongly suggested by the mate who vehemently condemned the activities of the elders, is that the holy names of Lord Viṣṇu be uttered in the Nāyakī's hearing besides sprinkling on her the dust collected from the feet of the Lord's pious devotees;

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BOOK V

Fifth Centum—First Decad (V-1)
(Kai ār Cakkarattu)

Preamble

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meyyē peṟṟoḻintēṉ; viti vāykkiṉṟu kāppār ār?
aiyō! kaṇṇa-pirāṉ! aṟaiyō iṉip pōṉālē! (V-1-1)

Translation

Still engrossed with pleasures sensual, I did sham
Love unto you and called you out many a time,
As my Lord of sapphire hue, holding the discus majestic and so on,
And yet, you did your grace on this imposter rain
As if I am genuine; ha! who can its influx resist?
Oh, Kaṇṇapirāṉ, You can't from me part hence, even if you insist.

Note

No doubt, the effulgent discus in the Lord's exquisite hand and His sapphire hue are very attractive and can easily steal

away the hearts of beholders. The Āḻvār's heart, hard like steel, is, however, impervious and yet he called out the Lord, not once, but several times, shamming the love of true devotees. Apart from this treachery of the tongue, the Āḻvār's behaviour, as he puts it, was also most unworthy of the Lord's grace. And yet, he now exults that he has been rewarded like the true devotees soaked in God-love, and exclaims that none can obstruct the influx of His voluntary grace, flowing with remarkable spontaniety. In this hour of victory the Āḻvār challenges, with a gusto, even the Lord to get parted from him, if He can! Did He not declare, as Śri Rāma, on the seashore, that He would not give up any one who sought refuge in Him, even if the supplicant be a foe in the disguise of a friend, an imposter? It is not as if the omniscient Lord has been duped into believing a pretender and taking him at his face value. The truth is that, though He is Omnipotent, He elects to be incapable of abandoning the sinner, when the latter seeks His protection, half-heartedly though, in view of the eternal bond of relationship subsisting between the Creator and the Creature. Perfectly safe under the wings of the Lord's mercy, the Āḻvār makes bold to declare that the Lord cannot tear Himself away from him.

pōṉāy mā marutiṉ naṭuvē! eṉ pollā maṇiyē!
tēṉē! iṉ-amutē! eṉṟu eṉṟē cila kūttuc colla,
tāṉēl, em perumāṉ avaṉ eṉ-āki oḻintāṉ;
vāṉē, mā nilamē, maṟṟum, muṟṟum eṉ uḷḷaṉavē. (V–1–2)

Translation

Shamming deep love, I called out the Lord
As the One who 'tween the twin trees crawled,
My honey, nectar grand, gem of the purest ray serene
And so on; lo! the Lord and His possessions have now become mine
And the cosmic duties He carries out from within me.

Note

The Divine child (Kṛṣṇa) was tied to a pounder by the Mother, as a punishment. But the child dragged it along and crawled

in between two 'Maruta' trees and felled them. The Mother grew apprehensive of the safety of the child and it was, therefore, quite all right when she questioned the young one anxiously, 'Ha! my darling, did you crawl between the trees?' But the Āḻvār repeats it now, as if he had even a fraction of the concern of the Mother. How pretentious! And yet, the Omniscient Lord has been pleased to take him at his face value and unto him repaired with all His retinue and got inside him. The Āḻvār wonders how this could be. (In him that is charged with God-love, the entire world of God stands illumined. This is now demonstrated.)

uḷḷaṉa maṟṟu uḷavā, puṟamē cila māyam colli,
vaḷḷal! maṇivaṇṇaṉē! eṉṟu eṉṟē uṉṉaiyum vañcikkum
kaḷḷa maṉam tavirntē, uṉṉaik kaṇṭukoṇṭu uyntoḻintēṉ
veḷḷattu aṇaikkiṭantāy! iṉi uṉṉai viṭṭu eṉ koḷvaṉē? (V–1–3)

Translation

My Lord, resting on serpent-bed in the milk-ocean,
My mind was in other things steeped, but time and again
I tried to deceive you and uttered words insincere
Calling you out, oh, my Lord of sapphire hue, generous Sire,
And so on; with a mind by you redeemed and rendered pure,
You I now enjoy, I can't from you be apart any more.

Note

With a mind duly reconditioned by the Lord, purged of all its erstwhile grossness, dirt and delivery, the Āḻvār says, he cannot think of any but the most delectable Lord and there is no question of his giving up One who has such a strong hold on him and running after others who are hardly adorable and having nothing to grant, even if adored.

eṉ koḷvaṉ uṉṉai viṭṭu?–eṉṉum vācakaṅkaḷ colliyum,
vaṉ kaḷvaṉēṉ maṉattai valittu, kaṇṇa nīr karantu,
niṉkaṇ neruṅkavaittē, eṉatu āviyai nīkkakillēṉ;
eṉkaṇ maliṉam aṟuttu, eṉṉaik kūviaruḷāy, kaṇṇaṉē! (V–1–4)

Translation

Oh Kaṇṇā, I, a terrible thief, uttered words insincere
That I would think of none but you and now, may I implore
That you do forcibly reclaim my wayward mind with its woeful tears
And fix it on you besides ridding me of nescience dark
And lifting me up to you, away from the mesh intricate
(Of worldly life), whence my soul I am unable to extricate.

Note

There are two ways of appreciating the genesis of this song. The first is: " My Lord, You have no doubt redeemed my mind but I am still apprehensive of slipping back to my old ways, because of the impact of this material body and the mundane surroundings. I, therefore, pray that you be pleased to steer me clear of the material contacts and lift me up to your feet in Heaven ". The other elucidation is: In the preceding song, the Alvar declared that he had attained the Lord from whom he could not be separated any more. But that was only a mental appreciation while the Āḻvār longed for physical contact as well and actually held out his hand to clasp the Lord. The Lord could not be got hold of physically and the Āḻvār was quick to realise that it was not possible because of his material shackles. Hence, he prays unto the Lord to cut these out and make him stay at His feet for ever.

Terrible thief: The Āḻvār played the thief in two ways: While he was actually steeped in sensual pleasures, he addressed the Lord, professing great piety, that he thought of none but Him and things of that sort. Again, by holding himself as the Master of his soul which actually vested in the Lord, he had committed theft, a serious one, at that. The magnitude of a theft is determined by the value of the thing stolen and the rank and eminence of its owner. Seeing that the Jīva (Individual Soul) is the coveted possession of the Supreme Lord, the theft committed by the Āḻvār is terrible indeed.

It is indeed a very difficult task to wean the mind away from its escapades and ungodly pursuits and the Āḻvār has given it

up, as one much beyond his capacity. Only the Almighty Lord could do it and hence His intervention has been sought.

kaṇṇa-pirāṉai, viṇṇōr karumāṇikkattai, amutai,
naṇṇiyum naṇṇakillēṉ; naṭuvē ōr uṭampil iṭṭu,
tiṇṇam aḻuntak kaṭṭip pala ceyviṉai vaṉ kayiṟṟāl,
puṇṇai maṟaiya varintu, eṉṉaip pōra vaittāy, puṟamē. (V-1-5)

Translation

Oh, Kaṇṇā, I am near yet far from my nectar sweet,
The blue gem by Celestials adored, being put by you aside,
In a body by violent desires bound, neat outside
But full of dirt within and in blinding ignorance rendered weak.

Note

In this song, the Āḻvār expatiates on the heinous material contacts, referred to in the previous song. In the first two lines, he draws a picture of God-head, with melting tenderness, while, in the next two lines, he speaks of his own inglorious material shackles, with great abhorrence. Neatly cloaked outside, this body is but a bundle of guts and glands, blood and bones, nerves and muscles, dirt and delivery. But for the skin outside, it would become an easy prey to the greedy crows and man's whole occupation would then be to keep off the crows from pecking at the human flesh. This body stands as a big barrier between the Āḻvār and the Lord and therefore it is that the Āḻvār lustily pleads for its removal.

puṟam aṟak kaṭṭikkoṇṭu, iru valviṉaiyār kumaikkum
muṟai muṟai yākkai pukal oḻiyak kaṇṭu koṇṭoḻintēṉ;
niṟam uṭai nāl taṭam tōḷ, ceyya vāy, ceyya tāmaraikkaṇ,
aṟam muyal āḻi aṅkaik karumēṉi ammāṉ-taṉṉaiyē. (V-1-6)

Translation

Seen have I my Sire of sapphire hue with shoulders four,
Broad and lovely, coral lips, lotus eyes red and hands comely,
Wielding the discus dutiful and thus cut out the entry

Into this body, of actions good and bad that seek to enter
By turns and get badly mixed up, hard to decipher.

Notes

(i) The Āḷvār, who grieved over his serious handicap, the material shackles, in the two preceding songs, was compensated by the Lord, when He blessed him with the vision of His exquisite Form. In the resultant joy, the Āḷvār drowned his erstwhile miseries.

(ii) The so-called merit (Puṇya) and demerit (Pāpa) play havoc with this body, the seat of action, the one being as fettering as the other. A golden fetter is a fetter all the same.

(iii) The Āḷvār feels that the Lord is embracing him and His shoulders are thus mentioned first. Then He addresses sweet words and casts sweet glances and, in this very sequence, the Āḷvār refers to the Lord's coral lips and lotus eyes. The hands wielding the discus, a prominent member of the Lord's protection force, are mentioned next.

ammān āḻippirāṉavaṉ ev iṭattāṉ? yāṉ ār?
em mā pāviyarkkum viti vāykkiṉṟu vāykkum kaṇṭīr;
kaimmā tuṉpu oḻittāy! eṉṟu kaitalaipūcaliṭṭē
meym māl āyoḻintēṉ: empirāṉum eṉ mēlāṉē. (V-1-7)

Translation

How great is the Lord wielding the discus
And how unworthy am I and yet, how gracious
That He, my Benefactor great, should His grace immense shed
Unto me, a sinner great! with joined palms overhead
I did, in hollowness address Him, as the one who rescued
The elephant in great distress and a devotee true
He has turned me, with love immense unto Him!

Notes

(i) One can't but shrink back while contrasting one's own abject lowliness with the Lord's peerless excellence. Reciting the first line of the original text of this song, Piḷḷai-amutaṉar would exclaim: "How great and worthy He is, the Lord wielding the discus!" raising his arms up, pointing to heaven and then drop them down earthward, saying "how vile and unworthy I am!" And yet, when His grace descends and overflows its continents, this enormous disparity is more than made up. Then it is all one vast expanse of water (grace), where the high and low, big and small, cannot be differentiated. Śri Vedānta Deśika would appear to echo the substance of this song in Śloka 65 of his 'Dayā śatakaṁ', where he has observed that inundation of the Lord's grace has rendered one and all, big and low, quite even, all of them having been submerged under the vast expanse of His grace-people of low stature like Guha, the hunter chief, Sugrīva, the monkey King, a jungle inhabitant, named Śabari, kucela, the famished brahmin in rags, Kubjā, the malformed maid of Kamsa's establishment, the young Gopīs of Vraja, Mālākāra, the flower vendor etc., on the one hand, and Lord Śrīnivāsa Himself at that charming eminence, known as Tiruvēṅkaṭam, on the other.

(ii) The Lord's grace becomes all the more lustrous and pronounced, when it embraces even fakes like the Āḷvār (as he puts it). He just feigned devotion and referred to the Lord's rescue of Gajendra in distress, though not with the intense feeling of a true devotee whose heart can't but melt down at the Lord's post-haste arrival in the pond which was the scene of a titanic struggle between the elephant and a crocodile. The Lord pounced upon the Āḷvār even as a famished fellow pounces upon food.

mēlāt tēvarkaḷum nilat tēvarum mēvit toḻum
mālār vantu, iṉanāḷ aṭiyēṉ maṉattē maṉṉiṉār;
cēl ēy kaṇṇiyarum, perum celvamum, naṉmakkaḷum,
mēlāt tāy tantaiyum avarē iṉi āvārē. (V-1-8)

Translation

The Lord, by the exalted Celestials and Brahmins revered
And adored, now in my heart lovingly inheres;

He is from now on, All-in-one unto me,
The fish-eyed damsels, riches big, adorable parents and sweet progeny.

Note

The Lord, lovingly worshipped by vast multitudes in Heaven and the pious brahmins on Earth, has condescended to exhibit even greater love unto the Āḷvār than to them all. What is more, He has got right inside the Āḷvār. Little wonder then that the Āḷvār looks upon the Lord as the aggregate of all happiness derived by the earthlings through various sources, Father, Mother, Wife and all these.

āvār ār tuṇai? eṉṟu alai nīrk kaṭaluḷ aḻuntum
nāvāy pōl piṟavikkaṭaluḷ niṉṟu, nāṉ tuḷaṅka,
tēvu ār kōlattoṭum tiruc cakkaram caṅkiṉoṭum,
āā! eṉṟu aruḷceytu, aṭiyēṉoṭum āṉāṉē. (V–1–9)

Translation

Like unto a ship sinking in the surging ocean,
With none going to its rescue, I was struggling hard
In the ocean of worldly life when the resplendent Lord,
Wielding Conch and Discus and bursting with compassion,
Shed unto me His grace and in me joined, in a state of fusion.

Note

The Āḷvār gratefully acknowledges the supreme grace of the Lord in dispelling all his erstwhile miseries by exhibiting His exquisite charm and entering his person, making His union with him just as natural and perfect as His holding the glorious weapons-Conch and Discus.

āṉāṉ āḷuṭaiyāṉ eṉṟu aktē koṇṭu, ukantu vantu,
tāṉē iṉ-aruḷceytu, eṉṉai muṟṟavum tāṉ āṉāṉ;
mīṉ āy, āmaiyum āy, naraciṅkamum āy, kuṟaḷ āy,
kāṉ ār eṉamum āy, kaṟki ām iṉṉam-kār vaṇṇaṉē, (V–1–10)

Translation

That the cloud-hued Lord has me His vassal made
I gratefully uttered and He has His grace on me shed

Most lovingly and unto me become everything delicious;
He is the One who did incarnate as Fish, Wild Boar, Tortoise,
Man-Lion and Midget and will, as Kalki, appear in due course.

Note

The age-long efforts of the Lord, an indefatigable cultivator, to redeem and reclaim the Āḷvār, have, at long last, yielded results. The Āḷvār who is now God-bent, gratefully acknowledges the Lord's herculean efforts. And this simple gesture of the Āḷvār has drawn the Lord inside him, where He lovingly stays, firm and fast. This is, however, nothing new for the Lord who spared no pains in the process of sustentation and incarnated in various forms. Even as the clouds go on unleashing the rains, the cloud-hued Lord will not stop with the many incarnations already made by Him; He will also incarnate as Kalki hereafter. Looking at all the past incarnations of the Lord as those solely directed towards the Āḷvār's reclamation, His future Avatāra as 'Kalki' would seem to be superfluous but it is not so, being intended as a safeguard or corrective against the possible future pit-falls, as long as the Āḷvār remains in this abode.

kār vaṇṇaṉ, kaṇṇa-pirāṉ, kamalattaṭaṅkaṇṇaṉ-taṉṉai
ēr vaḷa oṇ kaḷaṉik kurukūrc caṭakōpaṉ coṉṉa
cīr vaṇṇam oṇ-tamiḻkaḷ ivai āyirattuḷ ip pattum
ārvaṇṇattāl uraippār aṭikkīḻp pukuvār polintē. (V–1–11)

Translation

Those that lovingly recite these songs ten,
Out of the perfect thousand Tamiḻ songs, composed by Caṭakōpaṉ
Of Kurukūr, with fertile fields where many a plough plies,
Adoring Kaṇṇaṉ, the cloud-hued Lord with lotus eyes,
Will remain pious unto Him and His feet attain.

Note

Those that recite these ten songs with intense love, as if they are drinking nectar, will remain pious Śrī Vaiṣṇavas during their stay here, and attain the Lord's feet, like unto children reposing on the mother's lap.

Fifth Centum—Second Decad (V-2)
(Polika Polika)

Preamble

In IV-10, the Āḷvār preached to the world at large the Supremacy of Lord Viṣṇu, in convincing style and thereby weaned the people from propitiating minor deities. The resultant upsurge of devotion to the Supreme Lord converted this abode into a land of bliss, hardly distinguishable from Heaven. This again resulted in a free flow of visitors from Heaven and other upper regions to this land, to behold and admire this new state of affairs. A golden era having thus been ushered in, the Āḷvār hails it in this decad. He also envisaged, with a prophetic vision, the happy preservation and propagation of God-love thus generated, in the coming ages as well, through the advent of the illustrious Tirumaṅkai Āḷvār and Saint Rāmānujācārya, the veritable destroyers of the evil forces of Kaliyuga.

polika! polika! polika! pōyiṟṟu val uyirc cāpam; [illai;
naliyum narakamum nainta; namaṉukku iṅku yātu oṉṟum
kaliyum keṭum; kaṇṭukoṇmiṉ; kaṭalvaṇṇaṉ pūtaṅkaḷ maṇmēl
maliyap pukuntu, icai pāṭi, āti, uḷitarak kaṇṭōm. (V–2–1)

Translation

Hail! hail! hail! the state of affairs new!
Gone are the sins heavy, the hells with miseries strewn
Have been destroyed; no work here for Yama's hordes
And Kali too will soon be destroyed, please note.
Seen everywhere are the devotees of the sea-hued Lord,
Singing sweet songs in His praise, all over the land.

Notes

(i) The Āḷvār says, "May this state of affairs flourish!" thrice over, after the Vedic pattern of "Śāntiḥ, Śāntiḥ, Santiḥ".

(ii) All sins, however, deadly, having been destroyed, there is no question of the Subjects going to hell and hence, there is no work for Yama, so far as the denizens of this abode are concerned.

(iii) Even Kali Puruṣa will soon become defunct-this was the prophesy of no less than Saint Nammāḷvār, blessed by the Supreme Lord with far-sighted knowledge, envisioning the future advent of Tirumaṅkai Āḷvār and Śri Rāmānuja. The expression, "Please note", carries with it an aura of certainty, the sure fulfilment of this prophesy. This is further reinforced by saying that the entire land is filled with devotees, singing the Lord's praise, leaving no room whatsoever for Yama and his hordes or Kali and his agents to step in and play their pranks.

kaṇṭōm, kaṇṭōm, kaṇṭōm; kaṇṇukku iṉiyaṉa kaṇṭōm;
toṇṭīr! ellīrum vārīr; toḷutu toḷutu niṉṟu Ārttum;
vaṇṭu ār taṇ am tuḷāyāṉ mātavaṉ pūtaṅkaḷ maṇmēl
paṇ-tāṉ pāṭi niṉṟu, āṭi, parantu tirikiṉṟaṉavē. (V–2–2)

Translation

Seen, seen, seen we have indeed, sights feasting the eyes!
Devotees of Mātavaṉ, donning tuḷaci garlands, cool and nice,
Studded with honey, are ambling about all over the place,
Singing songs tuneful and dancing merrily; Come, one and all,
Ye, pious men, revere them we shall and revel to our heart's fill.

Note

In the exuberance of his joy, the Āḷvār beckons like-minded devotees to come and enjoy this grand gathering of Śrī Vaiṣṇavas. This is in dire contrast to the unsightly world from which he wanted to be removed earlier (IV-9). The eyes prove their real worth, only when they behold such pious gatherings.

tiriyum kaliyukam niṅki, tēvarkaḷ tāmum pukuntu,
periya kitayukam paṟṟi, pēriṉpa veḷḷam peruka,
kariya mukilvaṇṇaṉ, emmāṉ, kaṭalvaṇṇaṉ pūtaṅkaḷ maṇmēl
iriyap pukuntu, icai pāṭi, eṅkum iṭam koṇṭaṉavē. (V–2–3)

Translation

Kaliyukam, with its morals topsy-turvy, is gone
And the golden Kitayukam, with morals sound, is back again;

The Devas too have come close to devotees, in ecstasy bound,
Singing with great eclat, filling the space all round,
The glory of the Lord of oceanic hue, like unto water-laden cloud.

Notes

(i) Packed with Śrī Vaiṣṇavas Lord Viṣṇu's devotees all over, this land now easily attracts even the exalted Nitya Sūrīs from the High Heavens. Earlier, as we saw in IV-9, this was a forbidden land of dirt and delivery.

(ii) The trend of Kali yuga, that is, toppling down all moral values, has been forecast in 'Mokṣa Dharma' of Mahā-Bhārata. And yet, Saint Nammāḷvār, born as early as on the 43rd day after the advent of Kaliyuga, could, ironically enough, turnout to be the destroyer of Kali, almost at its very inception.

(iii) The Heaven is reputed to be the land of perfect bliss and beatitude while this Earth used to be just the reverse. But what is the position now? The Earth is now inundated with bliss, ever in spate, throwing into shade even the Heaven.

(iv) The Śrī Vaiṣṇavas are now thronging all over, like the inhabitants of Ayodhya who went to Citrakūt to meet Śrī Rāma, singing all the way, "When are we going to have darsan of our cloud-hued Rāma, with valiant shoulders, firm and steadfast, the destroyer of the sorrows of the Universe?"

iṭam koḷ camayattai ellām eṭuttuk kaḷaivaṉa pōlē,
taṭam kaṭal-paḷḷip perumāṉ taṉṉuṭaip pūtaṅkaḷē āy,
kiṭantum, iruntum, eḻuntum, kītam palapala pāṭi,
naṭantum, paṟantum, kuṉittum, nāṭakam ceykiṉṟaṉavē.
(V-2-4)

Translation

This land is full of ardent devotees of the Lord,
Reposing on the milk-ocean; lying, sitting and standing,
Walking along, singing many a song and dancing,

Flying about with heels above the ground, they are revelling
Like those out to uproot the heretical religions rampant in the world.

Notes

(i) It is a matter of common knowledge that unwanted things easily multiply themselves at random and can be had in plenty dirt-cheap while life-saving herbs are very rare, needing such herculean effort to get at them, as Hanumān undertook to secure the life-giver, in the story of Rāmāyaṇa, uprooting the mount as a whole. Even so, the heretical religions grow up like mushrooms on a rainy day, while the Vedic religions are few, and so their propagation is limited. But now, the Āḻvār is most agreeably surprised to find the land seething with Śrī Vaiṣṇavas, bubbling with God-love. These God-lovers do not have to make any effort, as such, to root out the heresies. The latter will automatically vanish like the blade of grass when the paddy is harvested or the light introduced into a dark room, clearing the darkness as a matter-of-course.

(ii) As the devotees are entitled to even greater reverence than the Lord Himself, the Āḻvār enjoys the different postures of the devotees in their ravishing moments of God-love, even as he mentions the Lord's postures of sitting, standing and lying, quite often.

ceykiṉṟatu eṉ kaṇṇukku oṉṟē okkiṉṟatu-iv ulakattu
vaikuntan pūtaṅkaḷē āy, māyattiṉāl eṅkum maṉṉi;
aiyam oṉṟu illai; arakkar acurar piṟantīr uḷḷīrēl,
uyyum vakai illai, toṇṭīr! ūḻi peyarttiṭum koṉṟē. (V-2-5)

Translation

I see this land with the Lord's devotees full
And they act in many ways; the ungodly and devilish
Among you, worldlings, have no means of survival;
They will just finish you off and the world replenish
With the golden age ,there is hardly any doubt about this.

Note

To the Āḻvar's eyes, it is all one vast concourse of Śrī Vaiṣṇavas, including the 'Nityas' and 'Muktas' from Heaven, gathered here, there and everywhere. No doubt, Heaven is the Eternal Land whence there is no returning to this abode. There is, however, no bar for the denizens of Heaven moving out, at their volition, as distinguished from forcible expulsion. In this pious gathering, there is absolutely no place for the ungodly and the devilish, who will fare no better than Suka and Śāraṇa, the two spies from Rāvaṇa's Laṅkā, who smuggled themselves into Śrī Rāma's camp.

The Lord's devotees will not merely vanquish these quislings but also redeem the 'yuga' itself and usher in the Golden age (Kṛta yuga).

koṉṟu uyir uṇṇum vicāti, pakai, paci, tīyaṉa ellām
niṉṟu iv ulakil kaṭivāṉ, nēmip pirāṉ-tamar pōntār;
naṉṟu icai pāṭiyum, tuḷḷi āṭiyum, ñālam parantār;
ceṉṟu toḻutu, uymmiṉ; toṇṭīr!-cintaiyaic cenniṟuttiyē. (V–2–6)

Translation

Devotees of the Lord wielding the discus have come here
And spread themselves out, singing and strutting about,
To banish from this abode pestilence, hunger and hate,
Evils, one and all; Ye, worldlings! let not your minds wander,
Better fix them on morals sound and revere, with a mind pure,
These devotees and at their feet salvation secure.

Note

The Lord's devotees are here in this abode to quell all evils, just as His discus does. The Āḻvār exhorts the worldlings to get themselves salved through this holy band. A pre-condition for worship is concentration of the mind and this is being stressed here. Again, purity of worship consists in seeking nothing in return, worship being an end in itself.

niṟutti num uḷḷattuk koḷḷum teyvaṅkaḷ ummai uyyakkoḷ
maṟuttum avaṉōṭē kaṇṭīr; mārkkaṇṭēyaṉum kariyē;
kaṟutta maṉam oṉṟum vēṇṭā; kaṇṇaṉ allāl, teyvam illai;
iṟuppatu ellām avaṉ mūrtti-yāyavarkkē iṟumiṉē. (V–2–7)

Translation

The deities whom you in your minds forcibly lodge
And worship, help you only thro' the Supreme Lord
Whom they revere; Sour you needn't feel when I say
There's no God but Kaṇṇaṉ and all homage you pay
To other deities goes but to Him, as they His bodies are;
Well, Mārkkaṇṭēyaṉ will unto this witness bear.

Notes

(i) The Āḻvar was mighty glad that this land was full of Śrī Vaiṣṇavas but suddenly, he happened to notice a few non-vaiṣṇavas too, here and there. These were not only not attached to the Śrī Vaiṣṇavas but were immersed in the propitiation of the Godlings (minor deities). And so, the Āḻvār wished to bring them also round through advice. He tells them: "If you think you should persevere in your present method of worshipping the minor deities and propitiating them, you may, by-all-means, do so, but with the knowledge that there is but one God, namely, by Lord Kṛṣṇa (Viṣṇu) and all the other deities are but His bodies as stated in the upaniṣad. All the homage, that you pay unto your deities, actually reaches Him, as they are but His bodies. Already, you have blackened your faces by worshipping the lesser gods but now I find your minds also turning black, as you are evidently not happy with what I say. But then, I am telling you the barest truth. Mārkaṇṭēya whom you have all known as a staunch devotee of Śiva, will bear me out".

(ii) Very pleased with Mārkaṇṭēya's penances and deep devotion, Śiva told the supplicant:

"Mārkaṇṭeya, you have waited on me so long. I will now recommend you to our Sovereign Lord Nārāyaṇā whom

I myself wait upon, to hold my present position. The Supreme Lord will then requite you for all your services unto me. In doing this, I only follow the rules of hospitality which demand that if a guest happens to come, the host must offer food. If, however the host has no food, he has to guide the hungry guest to a good neighbour's house where he is sure to be fed; otherwise the host will sin ". Vide also notes under IV-10-8.

iṟukkum iṟai iṟuttu, uṇṇa, ev ulakukkum taṉ mūrtti
niṟuttiṉāṉ teyvaṅkaḷ āka; at teyva nāyakaṉ-tāṉē;
maṟut tiru mārvaṉavaṉ-taṉ pūtaṅkaḷ kītaṅkaḷ paṭi,
veṟuppu iṉṟi, ñālattu mikkār; mēvit toḻutu, uymmiṉ nīrē.
(V–2–8)

Translation

' Tis the Supreme Lord who has set up in different climes
The minor deities appropriate, to receive the homage the votaries pay them
And grant them boons; the devotees of the Lord with (*Śrī-vatsa*) the mole
On His winsome chest, singing songs of His glory, flourish well
In this abode; better revere them and in their footsteps follow.

Note

The Emperors of yore used to receive the tributes payable to them through the subordinate officials and, in the present day, Government dues are collected through a vast network of agencies. The Scriptures likewise prescribe the rites and rituals to be offered to the various deities who are but the agents of the Supreme Lord, rather, His bodies through which He carries out His enormous functions. The Āḻvār says that those who propitiate the minor deities can as well emulate the Śrī Vaiṣṇavas, who are spread all over this land and strightaway worship the Supreme Lord, the Sovereign Master to whom the minor deities owe allegiance.

mēvit toḻutu, uymmiṉ nīrkaḷ; vētap puṉita irukkai
nāvil koṇṭu, accutaṉ-taṉṉai ñāṉaviti piḻaiyāmē,
pūvil pukaiyum viḷakkum cāntamum nīrum malintu,
mēvit toḻum aṭiyārum pakavarum mikkatu ulakē. (V–2–9)

Translation

Here we have those that with devotion great serve the Lord
With flowers and incense, chanting the Vedic mantras sacred
And those immersed in deep contemplation of His traits auspicious;
Revere them all lovingly, ye, worldlings, and redeem yourselves.

Notes

(i) The two types of devotees, referred to here, correspond to Lakṣmaṇa who followed Śri Rāma into exile and served Him in all ways, and Bharata who was stationed at Nandigrām, in devout contemplation of Śrī Rāma.

(ii) ' *Devotion great*: This refers to the discipline of Bhakti mārga taught by Lord Kṛṣṇa.

mikka ulakukaḷ tōṟum mēvi, kaṇṇaṉ tirumūrtti
nakka pirāṉōṭu ayaṉum intiraṉum mutalākat
tokka amarar kuḻāṅkaḷ eṅkum parantaṉa; toṇṭīr!
okkat toḻa kiṟṟirākil, kaliyukam oṉṟum illaiyē. (V–2–10)

Translation

Ye, worldlings, the deities whom you do adore,
Nakkapirāṉ (Śiva) Ayaṉ (Brahmā), Intiraṉ and all others
Worship, in strength, the Lord Supreme of form exquisite and thrive well,
In their sprawling worlds; like these celestials you will also do well
To worship Him and thus Kali's mischief quell.

Note

Here is the certain recipe for counteracting the trend of Kaliyuga, which detracts men into worshipping the minor deities, instead of adoring the supreme Lord.

kaliyukam oṉṟum iṉṟikkē taṉ aṭiyārkku aruḷceyyum
maliyum cuṭar oḷi mūrtti, māyap pirāṉ, kaṇṇaṉ-taṉṉai,
kali vayal teṉ naṉ kurukūrk kārimāṟaṉ, caṭakōpaṉ
oli pukaḻ āyirattu ip pattu uḷḷattai mācu aṟukkumē. (V-2-11)

Translation

The hearts of those that recite these songs ten,
Out of the glorious thousand composed by Caṭakōpaṉ,
Of lovely Kurukūr in the south, with many a field fertile,
Adoring the wondrous Kaṇṇaṉ of resplendent Form that does dispel
Kali's influence unwholesome, will be rid of blemishes, one and all.

Note

This Tiruvāymoḻi will cleanse the minds of its chanters thoroughly and fix them, firm and fast, on to the Supreme Lord, to the exclusion of everything else, such as the adoration of other deities and selfish desires, the blemishes referred to in this end-song. Constant meditation on the Supreme Lord is characteristic of Kṛta yuga while such a thing is conspicuous by its complete absence in Kaliyuga. Thus the change of mind wrought by this decad changes the character of the Yuga too, replacing Kali by Kṛta yuga.

Fifth Centum—Third Decad (V-3)
(Mācu aṟu Cōti)

Preamble

The Āḻvār now reverts to the state that obtained in IV-8 and is all agog to get united with the Lord. Non-fulfilment of his intense longing, however, induces him to contemplate the drastic step of coming into the open and carrying his tale of woe to the public at large so that the unresponsive Lord could be arraigned at the bar of public opinion and the union with Him got accelerated. It might be recalled that Śrī Rāma who had invoked the King of the oceans, got furious, when the latter didn't turn up, and bade Lakṣmaṇa to bring unto Him the bow, so that the entire ocean could be dried up

for the monkey battalions to walk through to the other shore. The frustrated Āḻvār is also likewise poised to negative God-head altogether, if the union longed for, so intensely, by him cannot materialise, there and then.

It can now be easily inferred that the Āḻvār is once again in the 'Nāyakī' state, that is, the forlorn female lover, weighed down by the intensity of God-love, unable to brook separation from her Beloved, any longer. In Tamil literature, there is what is called the 'maṭal', the episode of the hero going a-hunting and casually meeting the heroine who happens to be alone, having got accidentally separated from her maids when they were all playing about, picking up flowers etc. The hero and the heroine exchange erotic glances and part. The heroine whose heart has been stolen away by the hero, draws a sketch of him and keeps on gazing at it, days on end; she languishes without food, does not tend her person, scratches her body with the teeth of a palmyrah stem and runs about with dishevelled hair, bitterly complaining to the on-lookers that she has been badly let down by a heartless fellow and things of that sort. Moved by the piteous condition of the forlorn lady, the people would intervene to hasten the union of the hero and the heroine or the hero himself would rush in, terrified by the slander heaped on his head, and take the lady. The third alternative would, of course, be for the lady to seek relief through death (suicide). The underlying sentiment is thus ardent love, egging the desperate lover on, to a public declaration of such love, sometimes culminating in the tragic act of self-immolation. 'Tolkāppiyam', the ancient Tamil work, seems to confine this to the males only, the mad lovers riding to death, through the Streets, on the toothed edge of a palmyrah stem, as if on a horse. But, in the North, females were also permitted to have recourse to 'maṭal' (e.g.) Sītā, Vegavati, Vāsavadattāi, Umā, Uṣā, Ulūpikā etc.

The Āḻvār's contemplated move is indeed extraordinary, the more so when he is in the vanguard of 'Prapannas' who are not to invoke any means other than God Himself and put to the imperative necessity of catering to His sole delight. Nevertheless, it cannot be criticised as improper; it is the exuberance of such love-intoxicated super-personalities that made them overshoot their mark. The Āḻvārs were no doubt endowed with supreme knowledge by the Lord Himself and they could, therefore, be expected to be above

criticism. But their knowledge was not the dry-as-dust stock but one transformed into intellectual love of God. In the exuberance of such love they were thrown into a state of mental imbalance (Bhakti pāravaśya) and acts performed in such a state are indeed praiseworthy and, surely, these are not comparable with the transgressions committed by the common people due to immaturity and ignorance in a relatively unevolved state, still under the grip of nescience. The Āḻvār's mental attitude is but an inevitable facet of God-love, seeking quick consummation by the Lord. It is worth contrasting the Nāyakī's present stance with that in IV-8. Whereas she was then prepared to abjure herself and her possessions if they could not be engaged in the Lord's service, she is now out to destroy Him and His cosmic wealth if He would not make Himself pliable to her. The mate could no longer keep the Nāyakī under sobering restraint and the latter was determined to destroy God-head even at the cost of her own destruction. The Lord could no longer afford to be a passive witness to this state of affairs and, therefore, He presented Himself to the Nāyakī and thus redeemed her and Himself.

mācu aṟu cōti eṉ ceyya vāy maṇikkuṉṟattai,
ācu aṟu cīlaṉai, āti mūrttiyai, nāṭiyē
pācaṟavu eyti, aṟivu iḻantu, eṉai nāḷaiyam?
ēcu aṟum ūravar kavvai tōḻī! eṉ ceyyumē? (V-3-1)

Translation

You know, my mate, my awareness is lost
And my lustre gone since long, in quest
Of the primordial Lord of splendour unalloyed and coral lips,
The mount of emerald, of loving condescension with no lapse;
How then will the rebuke of slanderous folks affect me?

Notes

(i) The mates of Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī, who had prior knowledge of her contemplated move, dissuaded her, in a low whisper, from going ahead with it, lest the people around should reproach her for her aggressive stance. The Nāyakī was, however, not in the least worried about public opinion; as a matter of fact, she had become impervious to it long back. The Nāyakī stood on a pedestal of her own and the magnitude of her privation from God, of Supreme eminence, was not comparable with any known to the common man of the world. Hence her reactions were also bound to differ widely from those of the worldlings in regard to their individual privations.

(ii) The Āḻvār was no doubt endowed by the Lord with knowledge, full and complete. But, intoxicated by God-love, the Nāyakī had long ago lost her mental equipoise; else, would she fall at the feet of bees and birds and beg of them to carry her message to God?

eṉ ceyyum ūravar kavvai, tōḻī! iṉi nammai?
eṉ ceyya tāmaraik kaṇṇaṉ eṉṉai niṟai koṇṭāṉ;
muṉ ceyya māmai iḻantu, mēṉi melivu eyti,
eṉ ceyya vāyum karuṅ kaṇṇum payappu ūrntavē. (V-3-2)

Translation

My Lord with red-lotus eyes robbed me of my modesty,
With my complexion gone, my body is thinning down,
The hue of my red lips and eyes black is also going down
What indeed is the reproof of these folks unto me?

Note

Queried by her mates as to how she could afford to ignore public opinion and be indifferent to it, the Nāyakī says that she is well past that stage, having lost all sense of awareness of the world long ago, when the Supreme Lord of exquisite charm stole away her heart. Pining for Him, she has thinned down alarmingly and is terribly off-colour. When she recounts these disquieting changes, it is not by way of stating her own loss; these were the things which had once attracted the Lord and the loss is, therefore, His and not hers.

ūrnta cakaṭam utaitta pātattaṉ, pēymulai
cārntu cuvaitta cevvāyaṉ, eṉṉai niṟai koṇṭāṉ;
pērntum peyarntum avaṉōṭu aṉṟi ōr col ilēṉ;
tīrnta eṉ tōḻī! eṉ ceyyum ūravar kavvaiyē? (V-3-3)

Translation

My seasoned mate, now and again, I keep talking of none
But the coral-lipped Lord who sucked the life out of the demon
And unto pieces kicked the devilish wheel; He robbed me
Of my traits feminine and now what is it to me,
The rebuke of these slanderous folks around?

Note

Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī enlightens her mate by saying that the Lord kicked the demon who entered the cart-wheel, to a thousand pieces, and sucked the demoness who feigned as the good mother, unto death, only to attract her and steal her heart away. It was earlier assumed by the mate that these incidents formed part of the general scheme of annihilation of the Lord's enemies set upon Him by Kamsa.

The Nāyakī feels tortured and tormented, due to her separation from the Lord. The mate whose role it is to put the Nāyakī on to her beloved, now questions the Nāyakī's wisdom in being soaked in God-love despite her pangs of separation from the Lord and suggests that she might as well turn her attention on other things and get over her misery. But the Nāyakī asserts that her thoughts are always rivetted to Him and consequently, her conversation has to necessarily revolve round Him. This gladdens the heart of the mate, quite in keeping with her true role and she hugs the Nāyakī to her bosom, in appreciation of the Nāyakī's steadfast love to God. It is against this background that the Nāyakī addresses her mate as the seasoned one. This is like Sītā's appreciation of Hanumān, after her initial doubts about his bonafides were dispelled.

ūravar kavvai eru iṭṭu, aṉṉai col nīr paṭuttu,
īra nel vitti, muḷaitta neñcap peruñ ceyyuḷ
pēr amar kātal kaṭal puraiya viḷaivitta
kār amar mēṉi nam kaṇṇaṉ, tōḻī! kaṭiyaṉē. (V–3–4)

Translation

Kaṇṇaṉ, my cloud-hued Lord, has indeed done me so much;
The rebukes of the folks around He made the manure rich,

My mother's sobering counsel, the channel of irrigation
And sowed He the seed of devotion that raised the crop rich,
Of God-love, in the spacious field of my heart, big as the ocean;
Could such a one, my mate, be dubbed cruel devoid of compassion!

Notes

(i) *Mate to the Nayakī*: "I don't mind your being indifferent to public opinion, if the Lord were at least with you, but now, you are neither here nor there. Why not give up the Lord who seems to treat you as of no consequence? ".

Nāyakī to the Mate: " Is it you speaking like this? How can I at all blame the Lord Who has kindled in me the undying flame of love? Smitten I am, no doubt, by the reproof of these folks, on one side and the poignance of my separation from the Lord on the other. But, don't you see that my mind dwells not on any but Him, under all circumstances? "

(ii) This song indicates the manner in which God-love of such magnitude was generated in the Nāyakī. The earthlings tried to nip her God-love right in the bud but their admonitions only intensified her love and thus proved a blessing in disguise. The constant attention of her mother and her wholesome counsel tended and nurtured this God-love in the Nāyakī, like unto a steady flow of water irrigating the fields. Having created such a fertile background, the Lord, as an indefatigable cultivator, sowed the seed of devotion in the Nayakī's heart and there sprouted the rich crop of God-love, sustained further by the vision of His exquisite Form, like unto the rain-cloud. The precise manner in which the Lord reclaims the sense-buried Soul and eventually takes it on to His exalted abode has been admirably set out in aphorism 104 of Ācārya Hṛdayam.

kaṭiyaṉ, koṭiyaṉ, neṭiya māl, ulakam koṇṭa
aṭiyaṉ, aṟivu-aru mēṉi māyattaṉ; ākilum,
koṭiya eṉ neñcam avaṉ eṉṟē kiṭakkum; ellē!
tuṭi koḷ iṭai maṭat tōḻi! aṉṉai eṉ ceyyumē? (V–3–5)

Translation

Agile and alert or cruelly indifferent could be the Lord,
Big beyond comprehension, His feet measured the worlds,
His form bewitching puts one in a daze and yet
My stubborn mind clings to Him alone, my thin-waisted, modest mate!
How can mother over me prevail [if you can't] ?

Notes

(i) The Nāyakī reinforces her stand vis-a-vis the Lord, as set out in the preceding song, by stating that she would adore the Lord even if He were to be a callous despot, bereft of good qualities, and that it was, therefore, no use trying to draw her away from the Lord. Be it a matter of recounting the auspicious traits of the Lord or of cataloguing His oppressive methods and tactics as listed in this song, the Nāyakī was indeed far more competent than the mate. This is because it is the Nāyakī and not the mate who has alternately tasted the bliss of union with the Lord and suffered the pangs of separation from Him.

(ii) If it suited His purpose, He could do a thing with the utmost speed and pounce upon the Subject, lulling the latter into a sense of false security that the union would last for ever; He would also not hesitate to leave the Subject in great distress by snapping Himself suddenly. Bent upon getting back the Kingdom lost by Indra, the Lord would leave no space for Bali and send him to the depths of the underworld. Knowing these oppressive tactics of the Lord as well as she did, the Nāyakī would nevertheless cling fast to Him. Drawbacks though these might be, still they are His drawbacks and the Lord's contact with them is enough to make the Nāyakī feel attracted to them. The emphasis is on the Lord's

contact, as such and not the nature or quality of the contact c.f. aphorisms 108 to 110 of 'Śrī Vacana Bhūṣaṇa'. Were it not disinterested love of God, love for its own sake, as distinguished from love induced by the Lord's auspicious traits, there should be an end of such love during those moments when the devotee feels frustrated and thinks that God is bereft of all those endearing qualities, he pined for. The Lord might be anything, selfish, time-serving, elusive and so on, but He shall be the sole refuge of the Āḷvār, under all circumstances. In Periya Tirumoḷi, XI-8-7 Tirumaṅkai Āḷvār also picturesquely brings home the inalienability of the 'Master-Servant' relationship between God and Man, whatever be the vicissitudes. Addressing the Lord, he says: "My Lord! you are generally known to be sweet as sugar-cane; even if you turn bitter like the margosa fruit, I, Your eternal servant, will covet nothing else but Your comely feet, like unto the caterpillar, bred on margosa leaf, eating nothing but that."

(iii) It is worth recalling, in this context what transpired between Anasūya Devi, wife of Sage Atri, and Sītā. Felicitating Sītā on her fidelity to her husband (giving up the palace and all its wealth and relatives and following Śrī Rāma into exile) Anasūya Devi exhorted that the husband needs to be venerated as God Himself, be he in town or wood, well or ill. Swayed by modesty, the bashful Sītā stood with down-cast eyes and spoke out: "It is indeed difficult for one to prove that my fidelity to Rāma stands by itself without any external provocations or inducements, as Rāma and his excellence can never remain apart. My fidelity will remain constant even if he were the exact reverse of what he is".

aṉṉai eṉ ceyyil eṉ? ūr eṉ collil eṉ? tōimīr!
eṉṉai iṉi umakku ācai illai; akappaṭṭēṉ-
muṉṉai amarar mutalvaṉ, vaṉ tuvarāpati
maṉṉaṉ, maṇivaṇṇaṉ, vācutēvaṉ valaiyuḷē. (V–3–6)

Translation

It matters not, my mate, what the mother says
Or the folks around, leave me alone, will you?
Ensnared am I by Vācutēvan of sapphire hue
Prince of Tuvārakai, the city beautiful, chief of '*Nityas*'.

Notes

(i) *Nityas*–the 'Nitya Sūris' or the Eternal Heroes, the ever-free angels in heaven.

(ii) Finding the Nāyakī implacable, her mates tried to impress upon her that, by her conduct, she would only imperil the life of her mother and it would be a terrible loss, all round—the Lord hasn't come to her, her mother would die and the folks around would heap abuses on her. But the Nāyakī tells them that, entranced as she is by the bewitching looks of Lord Kṛṣṇa, Prince of Dvārakā, all the above considerations would be of no avail and that they would do well not to pin their hopes on her any more. Actually, she has lost alike her vision and heart unto her Lord.

valaiyuḷ akappaṭuttu, eṉṉai nal neñcam kūvikkoṇṭu,
alai kaṭal-paḷḷi ammāṉai, āḷippirāṉ-taṉṉai,
kalai koḷ akal alkul-tōḻī! nam kaṇkaḷāl kaṇṭu,
talaiyil vaṇaṅkavum ām kolō, taiyalār muṉpē? (V–3–7)

Translation

My lovely mate, well-clad, shall we with our eyes behold
The Lord who ensnared me and away with my good heart fled
And rested on the surging ocean, the Benefactor, who the discus wields
And bow unto Him, well in front of these (rebuking) ladies?

Notes

(i) The Nāyakī longs for the Lord's presence so as to enable her to fall at His feet, right in front of the slanderous folks and silence them. These folks were slandering the Lord as faithless to the Nāyakī and the latter as foolishly sticking on to Him.

(ii) When Kūrathaḷvāṉ discoursed on this song in a place called Rājēntracōḷaṉ, a centenarian got up, shaking from head to foot and reverently queried whether it would be appropriate for the Nāyakī to bow unto her lover. The illustrious discourser quoted Sītā's conduct in this regard as the precedent. She told Hanumān when he took leave of her in Aśokavana at Laṅkā; " Pray, tell Śrī Rāma, corn to protect the entire world, that I prcstrate unto Him". Sundara Kāṇḍa XXXVIII 53.

The Sandals got separated from Rāma and went north. Sītā was separated from Him, later on, and she went south. Whereas the sandals, installed on the throne ruled over a whole Kingdom, Sītā was a miserable captive in Laṅkā, tormented and tortured by the seven hundred and odd Rākṣasīs. Sītā must have pondered within herself and realised that this disparity was due to the contact of the Sandals with Śrī Rāma's feet and the absence of such contact, in her case. Therefore it is that she now tells Hanumān, the Ācārya, that she prostrates at the feet of her Lord, albeit from that distance.

pēy mulai uṇṭu, cakaṭam pāyntu, marutu iṭai
pōy mutal cāyttu, puḷ vāy piḷantu, kaḷiṟu aṭṭa,
tū muṟuval-toṇṭaivāy pirāṉai en nāḷkolō
yām uṟukiṉṟatu, tōḻī! aṉṉaiyar nāṇavē? (V–3–8)

Translation

When shall we attain, my mate, the coral-lipped Lord,
Of smiles pure, who the demon's breast sucked, crawled
'Tween the twin trees and uprooted, unto pieces smashed
The wheel, cleaved the bird's beak and the elephant slammed,
So that these elders do their heads hang in shame?

Note

The Nāyakī enumerates the deeds of Lord Kṛṣṇa, directed towards the annihilation of the evil forces, the opponents of the devotees. If such a great Benefactor could come and

join her, it would put to shame the elders who were all bereft of good qualities, condemning Him as heartless, faithless and so on. It needs to be specially noted that the Lord's appearance is sought, in this song, by the Nāyaki, not for her embrace but to vindicate her Lord's glory in the eyes of the elders as the One who is not only quite responsive but also remorseful. Did He not, as Śrī Rāma, rush to the Ṛṣis of Daṇḍakāraṇya, to enquire their needs and place His services at their disposal and apologise to them profusely, finding that they had already come a few steps forward to exhibit their sufferings at the hands of the Rākṣasas?

nāṇum niṟaiyum kavarntu, eṉṉai nal neñcam kūvikkoṇṭu,
cēṉ uyar vāṉattu irukkum tēva pirāṉ-taṉṉai
āṉai eṉ tōḻī! ulakutōṟu alar tūṟṟi, ām
kōṇaikaḷ ceytu, kutiriyāy maṭal ūrtumē. (V–3–9)

Translation

Oh, mate, be sure, I shall unto *maṭal* resort, getting out of hand
And arraign, in every way and in all lands,
The Chief of the Celestials, Who my good mind stole
Besides my shyness and modesty and stays now in the heaven tall.

Note

In the seventh song of this decad, the Nāyakī had complained that the Lord had stolen her heart and fled with it to the milk-ocean. Apprehending that the Nāyakī might get at Him even there, He seems to have since gone to the high heavens, so as to be out of her reach. But the Nāyakī is now determined to get out of her shell and ferret Him out wherever He might go and expose Him thoroughly all over the land.

yām maṭal ūrntum, em āḻi aṅkaip pirāṉ uṭai
tū maṭal taṉ am tuḷāy-malar koṇṭu cūṭuvōm-
ām maṭam iṉṟi, teruvutōṟu ayal-taiyalār
nā maṭaṅkāp paḻi tūṟṟi, nāṭum iraikkavē. (V–3–10)

Translation

Shaking off all reserve, street after street shall I enter
And make women in all the worlds shout beside me and clamour,
In sheer sympathy for me, having recourse to *maṭal*,
And from the Lord, wielding the discus lovely, procure
And wear the tuḷaci garland, cool and lovely, with petals pure.

Note

If the Nāyakī contemplates such a drastic move, totally repugnant to her essential nature, it is because of the exuberance of her God-love and the resultant intolerance of delayed consummation. This aspect has already been dealt with, *in extenso*, in the preamble to this decad. At the end of all these hectic activities, all that the Nāyakī aspires for is the Lord's tuḷaci garland, that sacred basil. The Nāyakī still hopes that, frightened by this harrowing state of her darting forth, with '*Maṭal*' (the tooth-edged branch of the palmyrah tree) in hand, the Lord would rush forward, with discus in hand, and placate her by bedecking her with the tuḷaci garland worn on His person; if, however, He did not turn up, it would mean, she threatens, the end of them both as in a holocaust.

iraikkum karuṅ kaṭal vaṇṇaṉ kaṇṇa-pirāṉ-taṉṉai
viraik koḷ poḻil-kurukūr caṭakōpaṉ coṉṉa
niraik koḷ antāti ōr āyirattuḷ ip pattum
uraikka vallārkku vaikuntam ākum tam ūr ellām. (V–3–11)

Translation

Those that chant these songs ten,
Out of the thousand, chaste and elegant, of Caṭakōpaṉ,
From Kurukūr, abounding in orchards, full of fragrance,
Adoring Lord Kaṇṇaṉ, of the hue of the roaring ocean,
Will heavenly bliss enjoy right at their residence.

Notes

(i) The Lord will court those that recite these ten songs and remain inseparably united with them. Where the Lord

is there is Heaven and thus the chanters of this Tiruvāymoḷi (decad) get the Heaven transported unto them.

(ii) "*Roaring ocean*"—The ocean is in a state of upheaval, the bottom of the sea throwing the sands right up to the surface in violent agitation, like unto the king of the ocean who appeared before Rāma trembling, when the latter threatened to drive a shaft into the bosom of the sea and dry it up altogether. The Lord was in the same predicament as the King of the ocean when the Nāyaki threatened Him with dire consequences.

Fifth Centum—Fourth Decad (V-4)
(Ūr ellam tuñci)

Preamble

In order to put through the proceedings contemplated by the Nāyakī in the preceding decad, she has to first of all draw a sketch of her lover (the accused) for public exhibition and arraignment. But it is pitch dark and she can't draw the picture. It seems as if the Lord is afraid of being exposed by the Nāyakī and has deliberately induced darkness of such intensity, The whole world is fast asleep, and she has no company. In such a milieu, she has recourse to the contemplation ofthe Lord's auspicious traits, soothing indeed unto her aching heart.

ūr ellām tuñci, ulaku ellām naḷ iruḷ āy,
nīr ellām tēṟi, ōr nīḷ iravuāy nīṇṭatāl;
pār ellām uṇṭa nam pāmpu-aṇaiyāṉ vārāṉāl;
ār-ellē! valviṉaiyēṉ āvi kāppār, iṉiyē? (V–4–1)

Translation

The town is asleep and the world in darkness plunged,
Very, very quiet, the land and water have become;
Alas! 'tis one long night, the Lord on serpent-bed,
Who once ate up the worlds, unto me doesn't come;
Who will save the life of this terrible sinner indeed?

Note

The Nāyakī laments that the benevolent Lord, who sustained all the worlds with their contents, in His stomach and protected them during the deluge, does not come to her aid in her present state of distress. The slanderous folks whose gossips actually fostered her God-love are fast asleep and so is the rest of the world. The Nāyakī cannot move about either because it is one long night, even longer than the longish* nights of the Devas and visibility is next to nil. Further, there is none awake except her lone self.

āvi kāppār iṉi ār?-āḷ kaṭal maṇ viṇ mūṭi,
mā vikāram āy, ōr val iravuāy nīṇṭatāl;
kāvi cēr vaṇṇaṉ eṉ kaṇṇaṉum vārāṉāl;
pāviyēṉ neñcamē! nīyum pāṅku allaiyē. (V–4–2)

Translation

Who will save my life hereafter?
You, this sinner's mind, aren't friendly either;
Alas! tis one long, grim night that hides
The deep sea, the land and the sky; Kaṇṇaṉ, my Lord
Of blue tint, *my sole Refuge* doesn't unto me come.

Note

In the middle of the famous ' Rāsa Krīḍa, when Kṛṣṇa danced with the Gopīs, the damsels of Vrindāvan, He disappeared for a while, and the Gopis were thrown on tenter hooks. But then, Kṛṣṇa reappeared and made amends for His sudden withdrawal by assuming the form, *par excellence*, far more exquisite than in the earlier session. The Nāyakī too probably expected the Lord to present Himself before her likewise, but this expectation didn't materialise. Hence, this lamentation.

* Whereas 'Time' stands still in the self-luminous region, known as the 'High Heaven', and it is all day and no night (darkness-tamas), the day of the 'Devas' in the lower reaches of the upper worlds is as long as one year of ours, six months (mid-January to mid-July-Uttarāyana) constituting a day for them and the remaining six months (mid-July to mid-January—Dakṣiṇāyana) their night.

nīyum pāṅku allaikāṉ, neñcamē! nīḷ iravum
ōyum poḻutu iṉṟi, ūḻiāy nīṇṭatāl;
kāyum kaṭum cilai eṉ kākuttaṉ vārāṉāl;
māyum vakai aṟiyēṉ, valviṉaiyēṉ peṇ piṟantē. (V–4–3)

Translation

You too, my mind, do not with me co-operate;
Like unto eternity does the longish night further elongate;
Kākuttaṉ, whose stern bow does the enemies annihilate,
Appears not before me; this fell sinner knows not
How to end this life, born a woman, alas! what's my lot?

Note

The Nāyakī is in the same predicament as Sītā during her captivity in Laṅkā. Sītā lamented that there was none in that hostile land who could help her with poison or a sharp knife to end her miserable life. There at least, Sītā could hear the heartening sound from Śri Rāma's (Kākuttaṉ's) bow in the nearby battlefield, which disillusioned her and set her mind at ease, when Rāvaṇa produced the illusory head of Rāma and wanted her to believe that Rāma had been killed and his head severed. And now, Rāma does not come and present Himself before the Nāyakī. Her own mind, the principal accessory, does not subserve her, the darksome night, interminably long, aggravates her misery and above all, a woman that she is, with no independence, she is not free to die at will, by putting an end to her life.

peṇ piṟantār eytum perum tuyar kāṇkilēṉ eṉṟu
oṇ cuṭarōṉ vārātu oḷittāṉ; im maṇ aḷanta
kaṇ periya cevvāy em kār ēṟu vārāṉāl;
eṉ periya cintai nōy tīrppār ār eṉṉaiyē? (V–4–4)

Translation

Methinks the Sun from me hides and declines to see
A woman in such great distress; my cloud-hued Lord,
Trim as the bull, with eyes wide and lips red,

Who the worlds spanned, comes not unto me;
Alas! who can indeed cure me of my cruel mental malady?

Note

The sun's diurnal course is put through, regularly, at the Lord's command and he dare not disobey. And yet, he would not come out, for fear of seeing the Nāyakī in such great distress. At the same time, he is afraid of being hunted out by the Lord's emissaries and, therefore, keeps hiding somewhere beyond their reach. This has resulted in prolongation of the night. Well, Sun or no Sun, why should the Lord who had enthralled the Nāyakī and kept her madly in love with him, keep Himself away from her? This makes the Nāyakī dread the frightful prospect of having to linger for ever with her mental malady for which there seems to be no cure.

ār eṉṉai ārāyvār?—aṉṉaiyarum tōḻiyarum
nīr eṉṉē! eṉṉātē, nīḷ iravum tuñcuvarāl;
kār aṉṉa mēṉi nam kaṇṇaṉum vārāṉāl;
pēr eṉṉai māyātāl, valviṉaiyēṉ piṉ niṉṟē. (V–4–5)

Translation

The unrelenting elders and mates sleep thro' the long night;
Alas! our cloud-hued Kaṇṇaṉ too appears not before me,
Thus there's none to stand by and think of me
And yet, my name shall stay on, all right,
Although this fell sinner be dead and gone.

Note

Oh, how enchanting is this God-sickness! The Āḻvār who keeps scanning the whole scene, laments that there is none to think of him. What is even more exciting is his own statement that his name will outlive him. How true! the entire vaiṣṇavite world rests on him. But there the Nāyakī means to say that, on the one hand, the mates and the elders sleep on with no thought of her, while, on the other, the cloud-hued Lord is withholding Himself. And, therefore, she finds herself left alone and even if she dies, as she would

very much like to, her name would still stay behind, making it impossible to close the pages of history upon her. It is noteworthy that the Āḻvār bears the name of the Lord's feet (Śaṭakōpa) where all of us rest our heads.

piṉ niṉṟu kātal-nōy neñcam peritu aṭumāl;
muṉ niṉṟu irā-ūḻi kaṇ puṭaiya mūṭiṟṟāl;
maṉ niṉṟa cakkarattu em māyavaṉum vārāṉāl;
in niṉṟa nīḷ āvi kāppār ār, iv iṭattē ? (V–4–6)

Translation

This love-sickness which from behind eggs me on,
Does my mind consume; alas! this age-long night, right in front,
Blinds my eyes, my wondrous Lord who the inseparable discus holds on,
Comes not; who then can unto my lingering life protection grant?

Notes

(i) It is a strange sickness that afflicts the Nāyakī. This Godsickness or God-love keeps on pushing her from behind and will, she says, pursue her even on the yonder side of death, unlike the earthly kind of sickness, which holds sway only as long as there is life.

(ii) While the night makes for physical blindness, God-love screens her mind's eye. It is a pity, the darkness prevents the Nāyakī from beholding her Lord, if He were at all to present Himself before her at that hour.

kāppār ār, iv iṭattu? kaṅku iruḷiṉ nuṉ-tuḷi āy,
cēṉ-pālatu ūḻi āy, celkiṉṟa kaṅkulvāyt
tūṉ pāla veṇ caṅku cakkarattaṉ tōṉṟāṉāl;
tīp pāla valviṉaiyēṉ, teyvaṅkāḷ! eṉ ceykēṉō? (V–4–7)

Translation

The Lord, donning the discus and the conch, white and immaculate,
Appears not before me, this night, dark and dewy;
Who indeed can protect me, in this state?
Oh, godlings, what can this dreadful sinner do?

Notes

(i) When the whole world is plunged in protracted darkness the Nāyakī finds the godlings awake and, in a spirit of companionship, the wakeful Nāyakī cries out her woe to the wakeful deities and perhaps enlists their sympathy.

(ii) The Nāyakī who had earlier been proclaiming from the house-top that the Lord is the Sole Protector and we, His Subjects, are His exclusive vassals solely dependent on Him, now looks at the 'Jīva' (Soul), in isolation, and feels tormented, saying "how am I to be protected?"

teyvaṅkāḷ! eṉ ceykēṉ?—ōr iravu ēḻ ūḻi āy,
mey vantu niṉṟu, eṉatu āvi melivikkum;
kaivanta cakkarattu eṉ kaṇṇaṉum vārāṉāl;
taivanta taṉ teṉṟal vem cuṭaril tāṉ aṭumē. (V–4–8)

Translation

Oh, godlings, what can I do? ages, a single night does loom,
To torment my life, it has, in flesh and blood, come;
Even Kaṇṇaṉ, my Lord, who the Discus always wields
Comes not; so then the cool and soothing southerly breeze
Blisters me worse than the fire well ablaze.

Note

The Nāyakī is already emaciated due to separation from her Lord; the dark night of extra-ordinary duration now exploits her weakness by inflicting on her countless miseries. In her present state, even the cool, southerly breeze is far from soothing; actually, it produces the diametrically opposite effect. The night seems to assume, with a vengeance, several forms, (even as Sage Saubhari did for the enjoyment of pleasures with his numerous wives), to torment the Nāyakī in ever so many ways. In the olden days, when a person was pilloried in public for criminal offence, he would break down but the authority would nevertheless go on with

the punishment, after providing due nourishment for his revival such as butter-milk etc.

vem cuṭaril tāṉ aṭumāl, viṅku iruḷin nuṉ tuḷi āy;
am cuṭara veyyōṉ aṇi neṭum tēr tōṉṟātāl;
ceñ cuṭart tāmaraikkaṇ-celvaṉum vārāṉāl;
neñcu iṭar tīrppār iṉi yār?—niṉṟu urukukiṉṟēṉē. (V–4–9)

Translation

The darksome night with minute dew beset
Is unto me hotter than fire; alas! nowhere in sight
Is Sun's chariot, large and lovely or the opulent Lord bright,
Of red-lotus eyes; my heart does all the time melt.
Who will indeed my mind's ache dispel in such a state?

Note

The night is very oppressive and the Nāyakī is sinking deep in dejection. There is, however, no hope of relief yet: neither the Sun has come out nor even the Lord whom an ardent devotee of the calibre of the Nāyakī could reasonably expect in such moments of distress. Indeed, the Lord is the Sun that never sets and He illumines the entire universe Heaven downwards. The rising of the Sun would but be the dawn heralding the appearance of that Great Sun, the Lord. But then, the night is tormenting the Nāyakī, through its accomplice, the blistering dew, like unto Mārīca, pressed into service by the nefarious Rāvaṇa.

niṉṟu urukukiṉṟēṉē pōla, neṭu vāṉam
ceṉṟu uruki, nuṇ tuḷi āy, celkiṉṟa kaṅkulvāy
aṉṟu orukāl vaiyam aḷanta pirāṉ vārāṉ eṉṟu
oṉṟu orukāl collatu ulakō uṟaṅkumē! (V–4–10)

Translation

Alas! the world had into deep slumber gone,
In this dark night, the minute dew drops down the sky broad,
Like poor me, the sky too seems to melt down;
There's none to tell me but once that the Lord

Who spanned the worlds once upon a time,
Would not unto me care to come.

Notes

(i) The Nāyakī thinks that the dew drops come from the sky, melting down, in distress, like her c.f. similar sentiments expressed by the Nāyakī in II-I ante.

(ii) It would be some consolation for her, if there was yet another soul, awake like her, to sustain her by recounting the Lord's wondrous deeds as Tṛvikrama or tell her that she needn't expect the Lord whose habit it was to keep away like this. In the latter case, the moment the Nāyakī was disabused of her fond hopes, her life would be extinct.

uṟaṅkuvāṉ pōl yōkuceyta perumāṉai
ciṟanta poḻil cūḻ kurukūrc caṭakōpaṉ col
niṟam kiḷarnta antāti āyirattuḷ ip pattāl
iṟantu pōy vaikuntam cērāvāṟu eṅṅaṉēyō? (V–4–11)

Translation

How can those that recite these songs ten
Out of the tuneful thousand, composed by Caṭakōpaṉ
Of Kurukūr, surrounded by orchards lovely,
Adoring the Lord who is asleep apparently
But thinks out ways for His Subjects to thrive,
Fail to enter Heaven at the end of their lives?

Note

The Nāyakī had said, in the preceding song, that the whole world was asleep, suggesting that even the Lord had gone to sleep. The Lord was, however, quick to point out to the Āḷvār that He was not asleep but was only contemplating the manner in which He should present Himself to the Āḷvār and regale him. Thus informed, the Āḷvār could sustain himself and so also, the very township of Kurukūr, as could

be inferred from the reference to its orchards, gay and lovely. Those that are conversant with this decad are bound to reach at the end of the present span of life, the high heaven, the land of perennial light, presided over by the Lord, the perpetual Sun.

Fifth Centum – Fifth Decad (V-5)
(Eṅṅaṉēyō, aṉṉaimīrkāḷ)

Preamble

In the last decad, the Āḻvār felt miserably handicapped by darkness and dew, the inner meaning whereof is that this land of nescience is enveloped in 'tamas' or darkness. The Nāyakī's irresistible urge for the speedy attainment of the Lord, witnessed in V-3 (Mācu aṟu cōti), violently disturbed her firm conviction in the Lord as the Sole Means for attaining Him and made her contemplate the devious indulgence in self--effort, such as embarking on the technique of 'maṭal'. The dark, dewy night, presented in V-4 (Ūrellām tuñci), only typifies the Samsāra, with its characteristic nescience, into which one is thrown back, when one loses track of one's essential nature and with that, the correct perspective. In śloka 49 of the 'Stotra Ratna', Saint Yāmunācārya only echoed this, when he likened a person, entangled in 'Samsāra', to one badly caught up in foul weather, with dark, dense clouds gathering in, losing the sense of direction, beaten continually by ever-expanding miseries pouring in like the torrential rain. The sun-rise symbolises the removal of darkness, that is, ignorance and the influx of spiritual light (Satva) or purity. The Āḻvār could, with the return of light, enjoy, in his mind's eye, the glorious vision of the Lord, enshrined in Tirukkuṟuṅkuṭi.

This decad is sung by the Āḻvār, while still in the feminine state. The elders who tried to bring the Nāyakī round by admonishing her, are hit back. The Nāyakī questions the propriety ot their admonishing her whose heart stands rivetted to the exquisite form of the Lord at Tirukkuṟuṅkuṭi.

eṅṅaṉēyō, aṉṉaimīrkāḷ! eṉṉai muṉivatu nīr?
naṅkal kōlat tirukkuṟuṅkuṭi nampiyai nāṉ kaṇṭapiṉ,
caṅkinōṭum, nēmiyōṭum, tāmaraik kaṇkaḷōṭum,
ceṅkaṉi vāy oṉṟiṉōṭum, celkiṉṟatu eṉ neñcamē. (V–5–1)

Translation

Lift I can't my mind from Nampi, the Lord exquisite,
I beheld at Tirukkuṟuṅkuṭi, the conch and discus
In His hands, His lotus eyes and red lips, peerless;
With me how can you, elders, find fault?

Notes

(i) This pilgirim centre, deep south in Tamil Nadu, is also known as *Vaiṣṇava Vāmana Kṣetra*. The end-stanza of this decad also says that those who learn this decad will become Vaiṣṇavas. Further, it was at this particular shrine that Kāriyār, the father of Māṟaṉ (who later became Saint Nammāḻvār), prayed for an issue and the Lord signified to him through the temple priest that He would Himself incarnate as his son and blessed the couple with temple honours. At the Lord's command, His high Chamberlain, Śeneśa, otherwise known as Viṣvakeśena, incarnated as Nammāḻvār, the Saviour of mankind. And so, this pilgrim centre is intimately linked up with the advent of Nammāḻvār.;

(ii) The query, as in the last line of this verse, serves to bring out the fact that the Nāyakī has only followed in the footsteps of the elders who had initiated her in the worship of the Lord and, far from being blamed, she is really praise worthy. Be they one's sons or disciples, when they stand launched into the domain of God-love, they become worthy of worship. In this context, Īṭu cites the following apt anecdote. When Kūrattāḻvāṉ lost his mother, Naṅkayār, the father wavered for a while whether he should marry again and lead the life of a householder as ordained by the Śāstras. Seeing, however, the way step-mothers generally behave, the bereaved father's sympathy was on the side of the son,

the more so, when the latter was advancing spiritually. The father, therefore, decided to lean more on the son than on the Śāstras and thus be more serviceable to the son than be a slavish stickler to the ordinary rules for one's own gratification, rather than edification.

eṉ neñciṉāl nōkkik kāṇīr eṉṉai muṉiyātē;
teṉ naṉ cōlait tirukkuṟuṅkuṭi nampiyai nāṉ kaṇṭapiṉ,
miṉṉu nūlum, kuṇṭalamum, mārpil tirumaṟuvum,
maṉṉu pūṇum, nāṉku, tōḷum, vantu eṅkum niṉṟiṭumē.
(V–5–2)

Translation

Rather than admonish me, you elders will do well
To see thro' my mind; after I beheld
The Lord at Tirukkuṟuṅkuṭi with lovely orchards
The mole on His winsome chest, the shining sacred thread,
The ear-rings, the jewels on His person inseparably worn
And His shoulders four are by me seen wherever I turn.

Note

The elders will not allow themselves to be bamboozled by the Nāyakī and they insist that they too have seen the Lord at Tirukkuṟuṅkuṭi. The Nāyakī sharply retorts that, if only they could see through her eyes, they would feel the difference all right. Wherever she turned, she saw the shining sacred thread like the lightning tearing the bosom of the cloud, the mole on the Lord's chest, the sweet array of jewels and the shoulders of the Lord.

niṉṟiṭum, ticaikkum, naiyum eṉṟu aṉṉaiyarum muṉitir;
kuṉṟa māṭat tirukkuṟuṅkuṭi nampiyai nāṉ kaṇṭapiṉ,
veṉṟi villum, taṇṭum vāḷum, cakkaramum, caṅkamum,
niṉṟu tōṉṟik kaṇṇuḷ nīṅkā; neñcuḷḷum nīṅkāvē. (V–5–3)

Translation

You, elders say all things harsh about me,
That I wither down, looking stupid and dazed;
Better know that after my beholding the Lord at Tirukkuṟuṅkuṭi

With its castles tall, His victorious bow, mace,
Sword, conch and discus cannot from my mind be effaced.

Note

The Lord's lovely weapons also decorate the Lord's person just like His numerous jewels. This twin aspect is extended to the Nāyakī's own experience, the Lord's weapons feasting her eyes as well as her mind.

nīṅka nillā kaṇṇa nīrkaḷ eṉṟu aṉṉaiyarum muṉitir;
tēṉ koḷ cōlait tirukkuṟuṅkuṭi nampiyai nāṉ kaṇṭapiṉ,
pūn taṉ mālait taṉ tuḷāyum, poṉ muṭiyum, vaṭivum,
pāṅku tōṉṟum paṭṭum, nāṇum, pāviyēṉ pakkattavē. (V–5–4)

Translation

You are indeed cross with me, oh, Elders,
That it isn't possible to wipe off my tears;
After seeing the Lord at Tirukkuṟuṅkuṭi, with orchards lovely,
His gold crown, tuḷaci garland, cool and comely,
His form exquisite, the waist-band and silk robe fine,
All these beside this sinner do always shine.

Notes

(i) It is but appropriate that one sheds tears of joy while contemplating His auspicious traits. And so, the Nāyakī is at a loss to understand why the elderly women should frown at her for being in tears, all the time. She says that with the glorious vision of the Iconic Form of the Lord at Tirukkuṟuṅkuṭi, ever in front of her, she can't but shed tears of ecstasy, which will never dry up. Perhaps the flow of honey from the flowers in the big gardens of the pilgrim centre might stop but not the Nāyakī's tears. There is, therefore, no point in the elders being cross with her on this account.

(ii) The Nāyakī calls herself a sinner in spite of the glorious vision before her, because it is only a vision after all, outside the purview of her physical senses, the external perception, embrace etc.

pakkam nōkki niṟkum, naiyum eṉṟu aṉṉaiyarum muṉitir;
takka kīrttit tirukkuṟuṅkuṭi nampiyai nāṉ kaṇṭapiṉ,
tokka cōtit toṇṭai vāyum, nīṇṭa puruvaṅkaḷum,
takka tāmaraik kaṇṇum, pāviyēṉ āviyiṉ mēlaṉavē. (V–5–5)

Translation

That I pine for my Lord, you, elders, fret and fume,
Look do I, in all directions, for Him of great fame;
Having seen the Lord at Tirukkuṟuṅkuṭi, His red lips radiant,
Long brows and lotus eyes, a mass of radiance,
Prey on this sinner's life, in constant attendance.

Note

The Lord's fine features with symmetrical perfection naturally enthral the Nāyakī's mind and it meet would be that the elders looked upon her with pride instead of frowning at her.

mēlum vaṉ paḻi nam kuṭikku ivaḷ eṉṟu aṉṉai kāṇakkoṭāḷ;
cōlai cūḻ taṉ tirukkuṟuṅkuṭi nampiyai nāṉ kaṇṭapiṉ,
kōla nīḷ koṭi mūkkum, tāmaraik kaṇṇum, kaṉi vāyum,
nīla mēṉiyum, nāṉku tōḷum, eṉ neñcam niṟaintaṉavē. (V–5–6)

Translation

Mother fears this girl will bring a bad name
Unto her sacred clan for all time to come,
And the Lord at Tirukkuṟuṅkuṭi, she wouldn't allow me to behold,
But Him I have beheld, His nose, long and lovely, lips red,
Lotus eyes, blue tint and shoulders four have my mind filled.

Note

The Mother is apprehensive that the Nāyakī is transgressing her bounds as a 'prapanna' who has to await the descent of the Lord's grace, and decides not to allow the Nāyakī to see Nampi, (The perfect Lord) at Tirukkuṟuṅkuṭi. But then, this is like erecting a bund after all the water in the basin has flown down the stream. The truth of the matter

is that the Nāyakī has already seen Nampi and right from the moment she beheld Him, all the features of the Lord, as set out in this song, stand indelibly imprinted in her mind. The restrictions now imposed by the Mother have, therefore, no meaning. What would have been exceptionable in the earlier stages becomes praiseworthy in such an advanced state of uncontrollable yearning for quick consummation of God-love. It is a pity the elders could not appreciate this.

niṟainta vaṉ paḻi nam kuṭikku ivaḷ eṉṟu aṉṉai kāṇakkoṭāḷ;
ciṟanta kīrttit tirukkuṟuṅkuṭi nampiyai nāṉ kaṇṭapiṉ,
niṟainta cōti veḷḷam cūḻnta nīṇṭa poṉ mēṉiyoṭum
niṟaintu, eṉ uḷḷē niṉṟoḻintāṉ; nēmi aṅkai uḷatē. (V–5–7)

Translation

The mother wouldn't allow me to behold the Lord
At Tirukkuṟuṅkuṭi of high renown, lest I should,
A standing slur on her clan prove; but I've seen Him
And in my mind stands He firm, of golden form,
Radiance, full and flooding, with the comely Discus in His lovely palm.

Note

As already stated in V-3-4, the rebukes of the elders who can't see eye to eye with the Nāyakī in the matter of God-love, sedulously nurture it and the Nāyakī only feels elated, rather flattered by such rebukes. With all His ineffable radiant beauty, the Lord has entered inside the Nāyakī and filled her entire being (*Vigraha vyāpti* or specific presence as in His beautiful person, the iconic Form), as an act of benign grace. The Divine presence (*Vigraha vyāpti*), of God who abides latent (*Svarūpa vyāpti*) in the heart of one and all, becomes manifest when His grace and our sanctity co-operate. This was elicited by Nañcīyar from Tirukkurukai Piḷḷāṉ one day when the former was proceeding to the temple of Lord Raṅganātha.

kaiyuḷ naṉ mukam vaikkum, naiyum eṉṟu aṉṉaiyarum muṉitir;
mai koḷ māṭat tirukkuṟuṅkuṭi nampiyai nāṉ kaṇṭapiṉ,
ceyya tāmaraik kaṇṇum, alkulum, ciṟṟiṭaiyum, vaṭivum,
moyya nīḷ kuḻal tāḻnta tōḷkaḷum, pāviyēṉ muṉ niṟkumē.
(V–5–8)

Translation

You, elders, fret and frown that I do dwindle
And bury my lovely face into my palms;
Having seen the Lord at Tirukkuṟuṅkuṭi with black castles,
His eyes like the lotus red, His exquisite form,
The waist thin, the abdominal region and the shoulders
With the locks playing thereon, stay firm before this sinner.

Notes

(i) Seated inside the hollow of a tamarind tree in the quadrangle of the temple at Kurukūr (Āḻvār Tirunakari), the Saint enjoyed the vision of the Lord, enshrined at Tirukkuṟuṅkuṭi, as set above. Carried away by the splendour of the vision, the Nāyakī was, however, tempted to clasp the Lord of such exquisite charm. Her inability to do so makes her very sad and she, therefore, buries her face in her palms.

(ii) The mansions in Tirukkuṟuṅkuṭi have become black either on account of their antiquity or because the dark blue tint of the Lord's image enshrined there is reflected all around.

muṉ niṉṟāy eṉṟu tōḻimārkaḷum aṉṉaiyarum muṉitir;
maṉṉu māṭat tirukkuṟuṅkuṭi nampiyai nāṉ kaṇṭapiṉ,
ceṉṉi nīḷ muṭi āti āya ulappu il aṇikalattaṉ-
kaṉṉal, pāl, amutu āki vantu-eṉ neñcam kaḻiyāṉē. (V–5–9)

Translation

You, mates and elders, do chastise me
That I appear before all; I did see
The Lord at Tirukkuṟuṅkuṭi with mansions stately,

Wearing the crown long and countless other jewels lovely;
Firmly fixed in my mind since then stands
Like cane-juice, milk and nectar, this spectacle grand.

Note

The mates and the elders would want the Nāyaki to keep indoors, consistent with feminine modesty. But she says that the exquisite charm of the Lord at Tirukkuṟuṅkuṭi, bedecked with a vast array of lovely jewels, has already taken possession of her and that she is not, therefore, in a position to conform to the ordinary norms of feminine conduct. With the Lord in front of her mind all the time, how could she shut herself up behind the doors?

kaḻiya mikkatu ōr kātalaḷ ivaḷ eṉṟu aṉṉai kāṇakkoṭāḷ;
vaḻu il kīrttit tirukkuṟuṅkuṭi nampiyai nāṉ kaṇṭapiṉ,
kuḻumit tēvar kuḻaṅkaḷ kaitoḻac cōti-veḷḷattiṉuḷḷē
eḻuvatu ōr uru eṉ neñcuḷ eḻum; ārkkum aṟivu-aritē. (V–5–10)

Translation

My mother sees my God-love intense
And decides not to allow me access
To the Lord at Tirukkuṟuṅkuṭi any more;
Well, what does it unto me matter?
After I beheld Nampi of fame flawless,
The effulgent Lord, adored by Celestials in strength,
Does in my heart shine ever but this none here can comprehend.

Note

Surely, this is not a case of "out of sight, out of mind" or the proverbial mellowing of sorrow due to separation, with the passage of time. The Lord shines perpetually, in all His resplendence, before the Nāyaki's mind, a grand spectacle attracting even the denizens of heaven, clasping the hands of one another, so as not to be swept off by the Lord's brilliance in spate.

aṟivu-ariya pirāṉai, āḻi aṅkaiyaṉaiyē alaṟṟi,
naṟiya naṉ malar nāṭi, naṉ kurukurc caṭakōpaṉ coṉṉa
kuṟi koḷ āyirattuḷ ivai pattum tirukkuṟuṅkuṭi-ataṉmēl
aṟiyak kaṟṟu vallār vaiṭṇavar, āḻ kaṭal ñālattuḷḷē. (V–5–11)

Translation

Those that learn well these songs ten,
Which unto holy Tirukkuṟuṅkuṭi pertain,
Expatiating the grandeur of Nampi, His form, jewels and weapons,
Out of the thousand composed by Kurukūr Caṭakōpaṉ,
The connoisseur of fragrant flowers fine,
Chanting lustily the glory of the Lord, difficult to comprehend,
Who does the discus hold in His lovely hand,
Will as chaste vaiṭṇavar be lauded, in this world, sea-bound,

Notes

(i) *Fragrant flowers fine*: This could refer to either these hymns full of fragrance, like unto a collection of choice flowers of sweet fragrance of soulful flowers offered in a genuine spirit, emitting the fragrance of self-less service.

(ii) *Chaste Vaiṣṇavas*: Those who fully appreciate, despite their stay in this arid land of samsāra, the sanctity of the pilgrim centres, hallowed by the Lord's loving association, as well as the 'Nitya Sūris' in the High Heavens do.

Fifth Centum—Sixth Decad (V-6)
(Kaṭal–ñālam ceytēṉum)

Preamble

The Mother finds Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī, seated like a discourser, with the fingers in an instructional pose and declaring that it is she that created the whole world, that she would become the world herself and so on. The bewildered mother, when queried by her kinsmen says that the Nāyakī is perhaps possessed by the

Supreme Lord who is the Inner Self of all beings. Every song in this decad is in two distinct parts, namely, the narration of the Nāyakī's God-vision (man identified with God), followed by the Mother's suggestion that it is perhaps God who has taken possession of the Nāyakī, that speaks through her. There is of course, a parallel for this kind of behaviour of the Nāyakī in Śri Viṣṇu Purāṇa, V-13-23. In the midst of that rapturous ball-dance, the classical 'Rāsakrīdā', Lord Kṛṣṇa suddenly withdrew Himself from the Gopīs of Vṛndāvan, who were literally bursting with joy in the company of the Divine cowherd boy, who danced in between every two girls, assuming ubiquity to the extent needed. The Lord's sudden disappearance was motivated by His desire to stabilise the Gopīs' God-enjoyment, which was at its highest ebb at that crucial moment, much beyond their capacity to bear. Some time later, He appeared in their midst back again, assuming a far more enchanting Form than before, as if to make amends for the pangs of separation inflicted on them. But what happened to the Gopīs during this interval? They were sunk deep in dejection, expressed by them in immortal songs, known as 'Gopikā-Gītā', Some of the Gopīs also resorted to the technique of impersonation of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, so as to sustain themselves, as brought out in the Śloka of Śri Viṣṇu Purāṇa, referred to above. There was a Gopī claiming to be none other than Kṛṣṇa and calling upon her mates to verify the truth of her statement from her gait. Another asserted that she was Kṛṣṇa and started playing on the flute; yet another, posing as Kṛṣṇa, addressed a Gopī as: "You, deadly snake, stay, or I will kill you". That other Gopī deigned to play the role of Kāliyaṉ, the snake, so that she could be smeared with the dust from the feet of Kṛṣṇa (the Gopī simulating Kṛṣṇa). With appropriate gesticulations and a great deal of gusto, a Gopī feigning as Kṛṣṇa, performed feats such as holding Mount Govardhan aloft, slaying of Dhenukāsura and so on. By such means, these Gopīs managed to sustain themselves without succumbing to the pangs of separation from Śrī Kṛṣṇa. There is also the example set by Śrī Āṇṭāḷ through her immortal "Tiruppāvai", the daughter of a high class Brahmin (Viṣṇucitta) adopting, by inclination, the pastoral life of the shepherds and becoming one of them. This provides, therefore, the key to this decad.

kaṭal-ñālam ceytēṉum yāṉē eṉṉum;
kaṭal-ñālam āvēṉum yāṉē eṉṉum;
kaṭal-ñālam koṇṭēṉum yāṉē eṉṉum;
kaṭal-ñālam kīṇṭēṉum yāṉē eṉṉum;
kaṭal ñālam uṇṭēṉum yāṉe eṉṉum;
kaṭal ñālattu icaṉ vantu ēṟakkolō?
kaṭal ñālattīrkku ivai eṉ collukēṉ-
kaṭal ñālattu eṉ makaḷ kaṟkiṉṟavē? (V–6–1)

Translation

Says my daughter of this sea-bound world,
'Tis she that this world did create,
And all the world she would permeate;
It was she that took (from Bali) all the worlds,
She it was that pulled the world out and held
In her stomach (during deluge) all the worlds;
Unto You worldlings, what can I say about this?
She is by the Lord Supreme possessed, perhaps.

Notes

(i) It is God that created the entire Universe. The relevant expressions in 'Candogya Upaniṣad' are 'Sadeva', 'Ekameva' and 'advitiyam', indicative of the fact that the Lord combines in Himself all the three causes of creation, namely, the 'Upādhāna' (material cause) 'Sahakāri' (Operative cause) and 'Nimitta' (Instrumental cause). The fact that the Lord is the sole cause of creation is underlined by the Nāyaki's statement that it is She (God, manifest in her) that created the sea-bound worlds.

Apart from the Lord combining in Himself the triple causes of creation, yet another unique feature is that He is not apart from the things created. He resides in all things and beings, having name and form. The different names denoting them all, refer to Him as well, He being the Inner Soul of all. This is indeed unique, as, in the work-a-day world, the names of the creator and the things created are distinct. In the terse language of Vedanta, this special feature is known

as 'aparyavasāna vritti' and this is what the Nāyaki emphasises. Having created the world, she also becomes the world, the thing created) by permeating the whole of it.

(ii) The mother wonders how her daughter, a staunch exponent of 'Viśiṣṭādvaita', the triune monism, says things smacking of absolute monism (advaita) and apprehends that the Nāyaki, perhaps, stands possessed by the Lord Himself and, therefore, speaks in this strain. The kinsmen who expected the mother to be more specific in her diagnosis of the Nāyaki's malady, are cut to size, when she says that her daughter is in such a highly evolved state of God-love, on a par with the exalted ever-free angels of Heaven, that her actions and utterances are much beyond the grasp of the worldlings who were utter strangers to such ennobling experience of God-love and God-enjoyment.

kaṟkum kalvikku ellai ilaṉē eṉṉum;
kaṟkum kalvi āvēṉum yāṉē eṉṉum;
kaṟkum kalvi ceyvēṉum yāṉē eṉṉum;
kaṟkum kalvi tīrppēṉum yāṉē eṉṉum;
kaṟkum kalvic cāramum yāṉē eṉṉum;
kaṟkum kalvi-nātaṉ vantu ēṟakkolō?
kaṟkum kalviyīrkku ivai eṉ collukēṉ-
kaṟkum kalvī eṉ makaḷ kāṇkiṉṟavē? (V–6–2)

Translation

On learning's threshold is my daughter and yet she says,
All branches of learning she had mastered, she is
Learning itself, all learning by her was set up,
She puts an end to it all and just stores it up
Inside her, she is the quintessence of all learning;
Evidently, she is by the Lord possessed, whom all learning
Reflects, what can I tell you, at the bottom of learning?

Notes

(i) The Lord is the embodiment of all learning, the aggregate of the Vedas; He disseminates particular branches of

learning at the appropriate moments; He is the final arbiter of the true meanings of the texts and at the time of dissolution of the worlds, He stores up all learning in His mind. Indeed, the object of all learning is to know Him.

(ii) *Mastered all learning*: Transposed as Kṛṣṇa, that the Nāyakī is, this could refer to the mastery attained by Śrī Kṛṣṇa within a marvellously short period of sixty-four days, as the pupil of Sāndīpini.

kāṇkiṉṟa nilam ellām yāṉe eṉṉum;
kāṇkiṉṟa vicumpu ellām yāṉē eṉṉum;
kāṇkiṉṟa vem tī ellām yāṉē eṉṉum;
kāṇkiṉṟa ik kāṟṟu ellām yāṉē eṉṉum;
kāṇkiṉṟa kaṭal ellām yāṉē eṉṉum;
kāṇkiṉṟa kaṭal vaṇṇaṉ ēṟakkolō?
kāṇkiṉṟa ulakattīrkku ēṉ collukēṉ-
kāṇkiṉṟa eṉ kārikai ceykiṉṟavē? (V–6–3)

Translation

Says my daughter with insight clear,
The visible elements, the Earth, Wind and Water,
Sky and Fire she is; seems she possessed indeed
By the sea-hued Lord, what can I tell you, of this world?

Note

The mother tells the kinsmen that, unlike them all, with a narrow vision, confined to the things seen around, her daughter (Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī) has a cosmic vision. New visions of beauty shine before the eyes of a Saint. He alone can see and enjoy the viśvarūpa (Universal form) of the Lord. He hears the unheard melodies and enjoys divine scents, unfelt on the Earth, and soars into an ampler ether, diviner air. The Nāyakī, deputising as God, says that she is everything, the elements and all, with the clear knowledge that the elements are subject to His control and are ordained by Him.

ceykiṉṟa kiti ellām yāṉē eṉṉum;
ceyvāṉ niṉṟaṉakaḷum yāṉē eṉṉum;
ceytu muṉ iṟantavum yāṉē eṉṉum;
ceykaip payaṉ uṇpēṉum yāṉē eṉṉum;
ceyvārkaḷaic ceyvēṉum yāṉē eṉṉum:
ceyya kamalakkaṇṇaṉ ēṟakkolō?
ceyya ulakattīrkku ivai eṉ collukēṉ-
ceyya kaṉivāy iḷa-māṉ tiṟattē? (V–6–4)

Translation

Says this tender girl with lips like red fruit,
'Tis she that dominates all acts, past, present and future,
And she 'tis that creates the authors of those acts,
And again, 'tis she that enjoys their fruits,
It seems, the Lord of red lotus eyes has into her got;
Of her, what indeed can I tell you, an innocent lot?

Note

The Lord is referred to as the enjoyer of the fruits of all actions which He controls, both the performance and the performers. c.f. śloka IX-24, Bhagavad Gītā, where the Lord has said that it is He that is propitiated by the various acts, rites and rituals. The Nāyakī, possessed by God, speaks as though she is God. Not having the faintest idea of this strange malady, the poor, innocent kinsfolk foolishly insist upon having more and more details.

tiṟampāmal, maṇ kākkiṉṟēṉ yāṉē eṉṉum;
tiṟampāmal, malai eṭuttēṉē eṉṉum;
tiṟampāmal. acuraraik koṉṟēṉē eṉṉum;
tiṟam kāṭṭi, aṉṟu aivaraik kāttēṉē eṉṉum;
tiṟampāmal. kaṭal kaṭaintēṉē eṉṉum;
tiṟampāta kaṭalvaṇṇaṉ ēṟakkolō?
tiṟampāta ulakattīrkku eṉ collukēṉ-
tiṟampātu eṉ tiru makaḷ eytiṉavē? (V–6–5)

Translation

Declares my darling, 'tis she that justly governs the worlds,
She 'tis that lifted effortlessly mount (Govardan),

Slew the Asuras many unerringly and churned safely the milk-ocean,
Controlled once the military strategy and victory for the five (Pāṇḍavas) secured;
She seems, possessed by the sea-hued Lord of unremitting attention
Unto His devotees; to you, bent upon having all the information,
Oh, worldlings, What can I say of her that is beyond reclamation?

Note

All these deeds performed by the Supreme Lord, from time to time, the Nāyakī, possessed by Him, attributes to herself. How can the worldlings standing ashore comprehend the mysticism of the Nāyakī (Āḻvār), sunk deep in the ocean of Divine consciousness?

iṉa vēy m lai ēntiṉēṉ yāṉē eṉṉum;
iṉa ēṟukaḷ ceṟṟēṉum yāṉē eṉṉum;
iṉa āṉ-kaṉṟu mēyttēṉum yāṉē eṉṉum;
iṉa ā-nirai kāttēṉum yāṉē eṉṉum;
iṉa āyar talaivaṉum yāṉē eṉṉum:
iṉat tēvar talaivaṉ vantu ēṟakkolō?
iṉa vēl-kaṇ nallīrkku ivai eṉ collukēṉ-
iṉa vēl-kaṇṇi eṉ makaḷ uṟṟaṉavē? (V–6–5)

Translation

My spear-eyed daughter avers, 'tis she that lifted
Mount (Govardana) with bamboos profuse, slew the bulls seven,
She is the Cowherd-Chief that tended the calves many
And a multitude of cows: seems possessed by the Lord,
Chief of Celestials: unto you, the spear-eyed dames,
What can I say about my daughter, thus transformed?

Note

The Supreme Lord, Chief of the 'Nitya Sūris' in Heaven, having taken possession of the Nāyakī, she identifies herself

with His incarnation as Śrī Kṛṣṇa, as set out above. As a little lad, Krsna tended the calves, literally played with them, as one of them and when He came of age, He grazed the cows, a vast multitude, like unto the change-over from, 'Brahmacarya' (bachelorhood) to the next stage of 'Grahasta' (householder).

uṟṟārkaḷ eṉakku illai yārum eṉṉum;
uṟṟārkaḷ eṉakku iṅku ellārum eṉṉum;
uṟṟārkaḷaic ceyvēṉum yāṉē eṉṉum;
uṟṟārkaḷai aḻippēṉum yāṉē eṉṉum;
uṟṟārkaḷukku uṟṟēṉum yāṉē eṉṉum:
uṟṟārili māyaṉ vantu ēṟakkolō?
uṟṟīrkaṭku eṉ collic collukēṉ yāṉ-
uṟṟu eṉṉuṭaip pētai uraikkiṉṟavē? (V–6–7)

Translation

What indeed can I tell you, my kinsmen?
Says my little one, with vision clear, relatives she has none
And yet, all are related to her, she makes relations
And 'tis she that destroys them too, she is all-in-one
Unto those that seek her, heart and soul; seems taken in
By the wondrous Lord whom by mere self-effort none can attain?

Notes

(i) The Lord can be said to have no relations, in the sense that the individual souls either stray away from Him and run after minor deities or those that seek Him are not quite conscious of their true inter-relationship. In any case, none has ever attained Him through self-effort alone, without His co-operative grace.

(ii) All are related to the Lord, as they are all His subjects for whom He has great concern and He helps them all, unseen, even though they may not be conscious of this. Even if the subjects propitiate minor deities, He is the ultimate object of adoration, being the Internal Controller of those deities as well.

(iii) The Lord makes relatives in the sense that He attracts the subjects unto Him by exhibiting His charms. He also puts aside those, who are, by dint of their Karma, oblivious of their relationship with Him and are inclined towards minor deities. This is just as bad as destroying their relationship with Him. In a sense, the Lord can also be taken to destroy His devotees, exclusively related to Him, by making them solely absorbed in His beauty, traits and deeds and destroying their sense of individuality. Thus, they get literally lost in Him.

(iv) The Lord is 'All-in-one' and constitutes every conceivable relationship unto those that look upon Him, as the Sole Sustainer. (c.f. Śloka 5 of Stotra Ratna of Saint Yāmuna, where he a'ores Saint Nammāḻvār, in this manner.)

uraikkiṉṟa mukkaṉ–pirāṉ yāṉē eṉṉum;
 uraikkiṉṟa ticaimukaṉ yāṉē eṉṉum;
uraikkiṉṟa amararum yāṉē eṉṉum;
 uraikkiṉṟa amarar-kōṉ yāṉē eṉṉum;
uraikkiṉṟa muṉivarum yāṉē eṉṉum:
 uraikkiṉṟa mukilavaṇṇaṉ ēṟakkolō?
uraikkiṉṟa ulakattīrkku eṉ collukēṉ-
 uraikkiṉṟa eṉ kōmaḷa oṇ koṭikkē? (V–6–8)

Translation

How nice is my tendril-like darling's speech! What can I tell
You worldlings that insist I should about her tell?
Claims she to be Mukkaṭpirāṉ (Śiva) who, some proclaim,
Is the Lord Supreme, as well as Ticaimukaṉ of great fame,
The exalted devas and their eminent chief besides the Sages
Of great renown; Could it be that she stands
Possessed by the redoubted Lord, cloud-hued?

Note

What the Nāyakī brings out here is that the Supreme Lord is the Internal Controller of all, including Śiva, Ticaimukaṉ

(Brahmā), Indra and other celebrities. They just constitute His bodies, in the same way as all other beings and things.

koṭiya viṉai yātum ilaṉē eṉṉum;
 koṭiya viṉai āvēṉum yāṉē eṉṉum;
koṭiya viṉai ceyvēṉum yāṉē eṉṉum;
 koṭya viṉai tīrppēṉum yāṉē eṉṉum;
koṭiyāṉ ilaṅkai ceṟṟēṉē eṉṉum:
 koṭiya puḷ uṭaiyavaṉ ēṟakkolō?
koṭiya ulakattīrkku ivai eṉ collukēn-
 koṭiyēṉ koṭi eṉ makaḷ kōlaṅkaḷē? (V–6–9)

Translation

Unto you, importunate worldlings, what can I say
About the antics lovely of this sinner's daughter, like unto a creeper?
Aloof she stands from (the subjects') evil acts, she says
While in evil acts persist (those that do her displeasure incur),
Again, she it is that cures the (devotees') fell sins and passes
Them on to (their opponents) others, 'tis she that reduced to ashes
The felon's Laṅkā; is she by Him possessed who bears
The bird tough (unto His opponents) on His banner?

Note

The sentient and non-sentient beings are the Lord's bodies. He is thus the 'Viśeṣya' or Substance present in all these bodies, known as the 'Viśeṣaṇa', the attributes or modes of the Lord. While the attributes undergo transformations, such as growth and decay, enjoyment and misery, the 'Viśeṣya' undergoes no changes and is 'nirvikāra'. While the 'Jīva' or the individual Soul experiences alternately, weal and woe, the Lord inside the 'Jīva' remains unattached to the fruits of the actions of the Jīva. While the body, the outer cloak of the 'Jīva', is imposed on the latter by dint of its past 'Karma' (acts), the Lord enters the Jīva, as a matter of grace, not bound by the compulsions of a pre-determined factor. Creation actually means that

He makes the non-sentient things undergo the changes of state and endows the individual souls with bodies and sense-organs, thus providing the necessary scope for expansion of their knowledge. The disparities in the created beings, some being happy and others sorrowful, will not, however, render the Lord guilty of partiality and cruelty. The inequalities are the direct results of the actions of the individuals, and their sufferings are intended to chasten them and cure their ills through a cleansing process.

kōlam koḷ cuvarkkamum yāṉē eṉṉum;
 kōlam il narakamum yāṉē eṉṉum;
kōlam tikaḷ mōkkamum yāṉe eṉṉum;
 kōlam koḷ uyirkaḷum yāṉē eṉṉum;
kōlam koḷ taṉimutal yāṉē eṉṉum:
 kōlam koḷ mukilvaṇṇaṉ ēṟakkolō?
kōlam koḷ ulakattīrkku eṉ collukēṉ-
 kōlam tikaḷ kōtai eṉ kūnt lukkē? (V–6–10)

Translation

Says my daughter, she is the cuvarkkam lovely, the dismal hell
And heavenly bliss (mōkkam); the souls with bodies many, at her disposal
She has; the Primordial Force, she also is, with its wonderful potential;
Perhaps, she is by the lovely cloud-hued Lord possessed;
What can I tell unto you people squatting here so well,
About my daughter whose locks are with lovely garland bedecked?

Notes

(i) The Lord dominates every thing, the Svarga, the Hell and the Heaven. The gnostic, whose goal is God, attaches little importance to the Svarga, as, in his eyes, it is no better than hell, the one being a golden fetter and the other, an iron fetter. And yet, the worldlings are enamoured of the pleasures of Svarga and perform austere penances for gaining access to it. It is only from their angle of vision, the Svarga has been qualified by the epithet, lovely, here.

(ii) The 'Mūla-Prakṛti, or the Primordial Force works wonders but even that can function only at the Lord's will. Hence, the Nāyaki, possessed by the Lord, says that she is the Mūla-Prakṛti also.

kūntal malar-maṅkaikkum maṇ-maṭantaikkum
 kula āyar-koḷuntukkum kēḷvaṉ-taṉṉai,
vāynta vaḷuti vaḷa nāṭaṉ, maṉṉu
 kurukūrc caṭakōpaṉ, kuṟṟēval ceytu,
āynta tamiḷ-mālai āyirattuḷ ivaiyum ōr
 pattum vallār ulakil
ēntu perum celvattarāyt tirumāl-
 aṭiyārkaḷaip pūcikka nōṟṟārkaḷē. (V–6–11)

Translation

Those that are well-versed in these songs ten,
Out of the thousand composed by Kurukūr Caṭakōpaṉ,
In intimate service of the Consort of (Lakṣmī) the lotus-born
With locks lovely, Dame Earth and (Nappiṉṉai) cream of shepherd clan,
Will, in this world, be blest with the huge wealth of devotion
Unto Tirumāl's votaries, for their due propitiation.

Notes

(i) Worship of the Lord's devotees is even more meritorious than worship of the Lord and it is rendered possible only through the Lord's special grace. The influx of the Lord's grace in this regard, is assured to the chanters of this decad.

(ii) Lakṣhmī, the unfailing intercessor between Man and God, unleashes her irresistible physical charms on the Lord, when, in His unbridled independence, He turns a deaf ear to her entreaty to admit unto His fold, the contrite supplicant at His door-step. By virtue of her privileged position, as His beloved spouse, she casts a bewitching spell on Him; enthralled by her ravishing

beauty, He then carries out Her dictates in full. The lovely locks of the Divine Mother of extraordinary fragrance play a very important part indeed, in this context. Hence, the reference to the Divine Mother's lovely locks, in this song.

Fifth Centum—Seventh Decad (V-7) (Nōṟṟa Nōṉpu)

Preamble

For the nonce, the Āḷvār attempted to sustain himself by impersonating the Lord, even as the damsels of Vṛndāvan did, during that oppressive break in the middle of the rapturous 'Rāsa Krīda'. But there, Lord Kṛṣṇa reappeared in an even more enchanting form than in the earlier session. But here, the Lord is still keeping Himself away from the Āḷvār, although, on the previous occasions, He obliged the Āḷvār with His appearance, mental vision of course, whenever the Āḷvār's longing for such communion was far too intense. Pondering within himself, the Āḷvār apprehends that the Lord might either want him to adopt other means such as karma, Jñāna, Bhakti yogas or intend to give him up on the ground that he was pursuing other means, instead of looking upon Him, as the sole Means. The Āḷvār, therefore, hastens to clarify his true stand at the feet of the Lord, enshrined in Vāṉamāmalai. This pilgrim centre, also known as Cirīvara Maṅkai, Cirīvara Maṅkalam and Nāṅkuṉēri, is deep south in the Tamiḷ Nādu. In each of the various pilgrim centres, the Lord displays one of His numerous auspicious traits prominently. In Vāṉamāmalai (Cirīvaramaṅkalam) shines, with extra-brilliance, the Lord's generosity, whereby He gives out to the devotees seeking Him with single-minded devotion, His very feet as their Sole Refuge. (vide aphorism 163 of Ācārya Hṛdayam).

nōṟṟa nōṉpu ilēṉ; nuṉ-aṟivu ilēṉ; ākilum, iṉi uṉṉai viṭṭu
āṟṟa kiṟkiṉṟilēṉ; araviṉ aṇai ammāṉē! [oṉṟum
cēṟṟut tāmarai cennel ūṭu malar cirīvaramaṅkalanakar
vīṟṟirunta entāy! uṉakku mikai allēṉ aṅkē. (V–7–1)

Translation

Oh, Lord on serpent-bed, in Cirīvaramaṅkalam you graciously reside.
Abounding in paddy fields rich where blooms lotus fine;
Rituals I haven't performed any, while of knowledge acute I am devoid
And yet, even for a while, apart from you I can't remain;
Surely, you can't keep me outside the scope of your protection.

Notes

(i) There was a time when the Āḷvār knew neither his essential nature (Svasvarūpa) nor that of the Supreme Lord. It was but natural that he should have foregone Him while in that state; how could he be made to forego Him even now when he is quite alive to His greatness and his own lowliness? But then, he hasn't pursued any of the well-known paths of discipline, karma yoga or Jñāna yoga or Bhakti yoga. The Āḷvār is, therefore, in the predicament of a hungry person without food, the means of appeasing his hunger. He wants the Lord, as the liberal Benefactor, to feed him looking to his enormous appetite (God-hunger) and he can't think of any other means but the Lord Himself.

(ii) Reference to the Lord's serpent—bed (Ādi Śeṣa) in the opening line, is suggestive of the Āḷvār's inordinate longing to serve the Lord, in ever so many ways, like the Ādiśeṣa. Here then is the suggestion to the Lord to enlist the Āḷvār in His service, like Ādiśeṣa.

aṅkuṟṟēṉ allēṉ; iṅkuṟṟēṉ allēṉ; uṉṉaik kāṇum Avāvil vīḻntu
eṅkuṟṟēṉum allēṉ; ilaṅkai ceṟṟa ammāṉē! [nāṉ
tiṅkaḷ cēr maṇi māṭam nīṭu cirīvaramaṅkalanakar uṟai
caṅku cakkarattāy! tamiyēṉukku aruḷāyē. (V–7–2)

Translation

Neither here nor there nor anywhere else am I,
But to behold you, oh, Sire, Who routed Ilaṅkai! I am sunk

In desire deep; my Lord wielding conch and discus, in Cirīvaramaṅkai,
With spacious streets and castles, stately and shining,
Pray do I unto you to salve this soul forlorn.

Notes

The Āḷvār submits that he does not belong to the happy band of denizens in the high Heavens, enjoying the immortal bliss of perpetual Divine Service nor has he joined the rank and file of the worldlings, following one or the other of the several paths of discipline, calling for personal effort to attain to His feet. There is also no question of his falling in line with the latter category, at least hereafter as he stands enthralled by the Lord's exquisite beauty and is languishing to behold Him, unable to brook separation from Him. Surely, He who routed Laṅkā and reclaimed Sītā, should have no difficulty in rooting the Āḷvār out from 'Samsāra'. Could there be a better recipient of His grace than the Āḷvār who is solely dependent on it?

karuḷap puḷ-koṭi, cakkarap paṭai, vāṉa nāṭa!
eṉ kārmukil-vaṇṇā!
poruḷ allāta eṉṉaip poruḷākki aṭimaikoṇṭāy!
teruḷ koḷ nāṉmaṟai vallavar palar vāḻ cirīvaramaṅkalanakarkku
aruḷ ceytu, aṅku iruntāy! aṟiyēṉ oru kaimmāṟē. (V–7–3)

Translation

Oh, Lord of Heaven, on Your banner is Karuḷaṉ and in Your hand
Is the discus valiant, my cloud-hued Lord, mere chaff was I
And yet, You Who gracefully reside in Cirīvaramaṅkai,
Full of Vedic scholars of knowledge chaste, have turned
This dud into Your vassal [hymning Your glory great]
I know not how to recompense You, my Benefactor great.

Note

In between the preceding stanza and this one, there would appear to have ensued a scintillating dialogue between the Lord and the Āḷvār. Put briefly, the Āḷvār who prayed in

the last song for the bestowal on Him of the Lord's grace, gets pulled up by Him, saying that there should be due merit in him deserving of His grace. The Āḷvār is quick to put the ball back into the Lord's court, by pointing out that He had already enlisted him, a mere dud with no equipment whatever, in His service. Had it not been for His grace galore, the Āḷvār wouldn't be able to render the glorious service (vācika kaiṅkarya) of singing the Tiruvāymoḷi, songs, *par excellence*. And so, the Āḷvār prays unto the Lord to go on bestowing His spontaneous grace on him as before, without looking for any merit (Means) in him; in fact, he has none whatsoever, comparable to the end in view, and what little merit there is in him already, has also been implanted by Him only. Oh, how gracious is the Supreme Lord of Heaven, obliging the pious and scholarly residents of Vāṉamāmalai with His nectarean presence, in the same way He does unto the denizens of Heaven and how indeed can the Āḷvār recompense Him for His Grace galore!

māṟu cēr paṭai nūṟṟuvar maṅka ōr aivarkkuāy, aṉṟu
māyappōr paṇṇi,
nīṟuceyta entāy! nilam kīṇṭa ammāṉē!
tēṟu ñāṉattar vēta vēḷvi aṟāc cirīvaramaṅkalanakar
ēṟi vīṟṟiruntāy! uṉṉai eṅku eytak kūvuvaṉē? (V–7–4)

Translation

The five (brothers) You befriended and had their hundred (cousins) routed,
It was a battle of wonderful strategy, by you directed;
My Lord, the Earth You once salvaged and now have You resorted
To Cirīvaramaṅkalam, inhabited by men of wisdom sound,
Where Vedic rituals go on, all the year round;
You, where and how indeed can I attain?

Notes

(i) In accordance with the Lord's avowed creed, He looks upon all impartially, no one is His foe or His favourite on grounds of caste, culture, beauty and temperament.

And yet, the Lord completely identifies Himself with His lovers, who stand rivetted to Him in thought, word, and deed and He looks upon their enemies as His. That is how, the Kauravas (hundred brothers) who were hostile to the Pāṇḍavas (their five cousins), became His enemies.

(ii) It was a wonderful battle indeed where devious methods were justifiably adopted to quell the wicked opponents. The Lord is known for upholding truth and justice and yet, if He adopted devious methods for outwitting the wicked opponents, it was perfectly justified.

(iii) Even as the Lord condescendingly came down and took His abode in Vāṉamāmalai like the pious ones of sound knowledge, who had already settled there and mingled with them delightfully, the Āḻvār wants the Lord to take the initiative in his case also, that is, He should either come down to him or take him up to His feet, adding to the list of many favours already heaped on him.

eytak kūvutal āvatē eṉakku? evva tevvattuḷ āyumāy niṉṟu,
kaitavaṅkaḷ ceyyum karu mēṉi Ammāṉē!
ceyta vēḷviyar vaiyattēvar aṟāc cirīvaramaṅkalanakar
kaitoḻa Iruntāy! atu nāṉum kaṇṭēṉē. (V–7–5)

Translation

Oh, dark-hued Lord, it isn't proper that I make any effort
To attain you; you would with the ungodly mingle and pervert
Their minds and get their brute strength cut out;
Adored by Brahmins who the vedic rituals have put thro',
Reside you do in Cirīvaramaṅkalam, well, I have seen it too.

Notes

(i) *The Lord to the Āḻvār*: "You cry out as if You haven't received any benefit from me; haven't You been shown my Iconic Form in Cirīvaramaṅkai?"

Āḻvār to the Lord: "Sire, I don't deny that, but that is hardly enough for me. I do long for perennial service at Your lotus feet".

Īśvara (God) is the 'Svāmi' (Master) while the Cetana (Jīva, the individual Soul) is the 'Svuṁ' (Property). It is this fundamental relationship that gives rise to the inescapable obligation of the Master in regard to His property, a matter of personal gain for Him indeed. It is against this back-ground that the Āḻvār points out, in this song, the impropriety of the property trying to get at the Master; it should actually be the other way round.

(ii) By sheer eloquence and fallacious arguments, the Lord did, as Buddha, pervert the minds of the ungodly Asuras, bent upon torturing and tormenting others, and beat them back. If these methods did not succeed, He would, in the last resort, mystify them and render them defunct by exhibiting His exquisite charm, vide detailed notes under V-10-4

ēṉam āy, nilam kiṇṭa eṉ appaṉē! kaṇṇā! eṉṟum eṉṉai āḷuṭai
vāṉa nāyakaṉē! maṇi māṇikkaccuṭarē!
tēṉa māmpoḷil taṇ cirīvaramaṅkalattavar kaitoḻa uṟai
vāṉamāmalaiyē! aṭiyēṉ toḻa vantaruḷē. (V–7–6)

Translation

Oh, Lord Vāṉamāmalai, reside you do in cool Cirīvaramaṅkai,
Surrounded by mango-orchards with honey in plenty,
And adored by its residents; as the Boar huge You pulled
The Earth out and put it back in its place, my Lord,
Me you have enlisted as Your vassal, oh Lord of heaven,
Radiant like gem and ruby, oh, Kaṇṇā, Pray come down
Unto me here that this vassal may also offer Thee salutation.

Notes

(i) 'Vāṉamāmalai' is alike the name of the Deity and the Pilgrim centre. It means, 'mountain, sky-high'; so very imposing is the Lord's Image there indeed and this description fits in admirably.

(ii) The Lord's incarnations are referred to by the Āḷvār, only to remind the Lord of the basic idea, namely, the elevation of the souls down below. 'Avatāra' means descent and He comes down to push up the subjects, working like a pulley system. The resuscitation of the Earth from under the waters of the Deluge, the Lord assuming the form of a Boar for this purpose, is specially mentioned by the Āḷvār to remind the Lord that he should also be similarly rescued from the bottomless ocean of Samsāra (worldly life).

(iii) The Lord is required to walk down to the Āḷvār's place, for the latter to enjoy His glorious gait.

vantaruḷi eṉ neñcu iṭam koṇṭa vāṉavar koḷuntē! ulakukku ōr
muntait tāy tantaiyē! muḻu ēḻ ulakum uṇṭāy!
centoḻilavar vēta vēḷvi aṟāc cirīvaramaṅkalanakar
antam il pukaḻāy! aṭiyēṉai akaṟṟēlē. (V–7–7)

Translation

Oh, Chief of Celestials, You deigned to come and lodge
In my heart; oh, Primate, You sustained, (during the Deluge),
All the worlds in Your stomach and now Your limitless grace
You do shed in Cirīvaramaṅkai where the pious ones
Of good deeds are in vedic rituals engaged;
Pray, despise not this vassal, my Lord.

Notes

(i) In the preceding song, the Āḷvār longed to see the Lord in His Iconic Form at Vāṉamāmalai, right where he was (inside the hollow of the tamarind tree in Āḷvār Tirunakari temple). But the Lord has not responded yet, giving room for the Āḷvār's apprehension of indifference on His part and hence he prays now that he should not be despised and denied the favour sought by him.

(ii) This song, where the Āḷvār gratefully acknowledges the boundless grace of the Lord of the Celestials in choosing his heart as His habitat, is said to have had a special appeal for Śrī Parāśara Bhaṭṭar. He asked his disciple, Nañciyar, to recite this song, and, following it up himself in rapturous strain, he observed with great feeling that it was indeed very nice of Saints like Nammāḻvār to have bequeathed such verses of melting tenderness to soften our stony hearts. He added that our hearts which are no better than barren rock, rough and rugged, despite the severest course of discipline and austerity, such as 'yama' 'niyama' etc, could be mellowed, tempered and liquefied, only by verses like this. Nañciyar was never tired of relating this incident to his disciples.

akaṟṟa nī vaitta māya val aimpulaṉkaḷām-avai naṉku aṟintaṉaṉ;
akaṟṟi eṉṉaiyum nī arum cēṟṟil vīḻttikaṇṭāy-
pakal-katir maṇi māṭam nītu cirīvaramaṅkai vāṇaṉē! eṉṟum
pukaṟku-ariya entāy! puḷḷiṉ vāy piḷantāṉē! (V–7–8)

Translation

Well aware am I of the mischief of the senses five,
You have set upon me to keep me aside
And push me back into the fell bog of pleasures sensual,
Oh, Lord, residing in Cirīvaramaṅkai with its castles tall,
You are, my Sire, ever beyond reach
(Of the ungodly), oh, you who tore off the demoniac bird's beak!

Note

The Āḷvār pleaded, in the preceding song, that He should not be despised by the Lord and made to drift away from Him. The Lord, who had endowed the Āḷvār with perfect knowledge of the Divine, could not, however, appreciate the basis of the Āḷvār's complaint. The Āḷvār makes his position abundantly clear in this song. Situated as he is, in this land of nescience, open to the hazards of succumbing to the mischief of the senses, he is afraid of untoward developments, despite all the knowledge imparted to him by the Lord. The Āḷvār, therefore, prays that he be untethered from the present moorings, so as to eliminate the possible risk of contamination, even as He tore off Bakāsura's (the demoniac bird's) beak.

puḷḷiṉ vāy piḷantāy! marutu iṭai pōyiṉāy! erutu ēḻ aṭartta eṉ
kaḷḷa māyavaṉē! karumāṇikkac cuṭarē!
teḷḷiyār tiru nāṉmaṟaikaḷ vallār mali taṉ cirīvaramaṅkai-
yuḷ irunta entāy! aruḷāy uyyumāṟu-eṉakkē. (V-7-9)

Translation

My Lord, staying in cool Cirivaramaṅkai where do dwell
Many a vedic scholar with knowledge sound! You tamed the bulls,
Wondrous and tricky, the bird's beak You did pull and quell,
'Tween the twin trees You crawled, oh Sire of sapphire hue!
Pray let me know the means of attaining You.

Note

In the preceding song, the Āḷvār laid two charges at the Lord's door, namely, (i) he had been kept away from the Lord and (ii) he got bogged down in the difficult terrain of samsāra. The Lord sent a feeler round, suggesting that it was due to his past sins he was in that predicament, to which this song is the rejoinder. Surely, the Āḷvār's sins were not as tough as the evil forces referred to in this song, which the Lord destroyed effortlessly. Removal of the so-called impediment, in the case of the Āḷvār, was so very trivial that the Lord should not hesitate to cut it out and enable the Āḷvār to render service at the Lord's feet, even as the pious Vaiṣṇavas of Vāṉamāmalai, with blemishless knowlege, do.

āṟu eṉakku niṉ pātamē caraṇ ākat tantoḻintāy; uṉakku ōrkaim-
māṟu nāṉ oṉṟu ilēṉ; eṉatu āviyum uṉatē-
cēṟu koḷ karumpum perum cennelum mali taṉ cirīvaramaṅkai
nāṟu pūn taṉ-tuḷāy muṭiyāy! teyva-nāyakaṉē! (V-7-10)

Translation

Oh, Teyvanāyakā, You wear on Your crown tuḷaci garland of fragrance sweet
And grace cool cirīvaramaṅkai, with paddy and sugarcane in plenty;

As my sole refuge, You have unto me vouchsafed Your lovely feet;
How indeed can I repay You for this gracious bounty?
Even my soul is Yours and there's nothing I can unto you offer

Notes

(i) 'Teivanāyakaṉ is the name of the Deity, enshrined in Vāṉamāmalai, meaning the overlord of all godlings, the Supreme Lord.

(ii) This decad began by emphasising the resourcelessness of the Āḷvār, that is, absence of any means other than the Lord Himself. (ākiñcanya). And now, in this concluding song, the Āḷvār compliments himself on the strength of his conviction that the Lord is at once the Means and the End and that the Lord's lovely feet, the ultimate destination, constitute the Means as well, his sole refuge. Giving up the means which have śāstraic backing and desisting from the pursuit of the prescribed paths of discipline, should not, however, be construed as being tantamount to atheism or loss of faith in the sanctity of the Scriptures. The point driven home here is the Āḷvār's robust faith and love in the Supreme Lord as the Means and the End, rolled into one, and sticking to Him exclusively. This is like Service unto the Lord taking precedence over the daily rituals enjoined by the Śāstras. No harm will accrue to the Subject by skipping over the rituals, in this particular context, even as the snake-charmer, armed with the requisite herbal antidote, inserts his hand into the viper's mouth with impunity. Any other person, not so equipped, will meet certain death, if he ventures to take liberties with the poisonous snake; likewise, it will be grievously wrong to give up the religious pursuits enjoined by the Śāstras, when not actually engaged in Divine Service.

(iii) Aphorism 19 of "Ācārya hṛdayam" succinctly brings out the difference between those who pin their faith to the eight-syllabled 'Tirumantra', inculcating a sense of total surrender to His grace and complete subservience

to the Lord as His eternal vassal and those guided by other texts. The latter category (Śâstrajñas, well-versed in Śâstras) can be likened to those trying to swim across deep waters, clinging to an inflated tube or raft with one hand and oaring with the other-a combination of the light obtained from the Śâstras with their own individual effort. The former category is like unto those seated on the cross planks of a boat (the Lord's grace) launched into the waters, eagerly looking forward to reaching the shore, thus depending entirely on the Lord's grace, with no effort of their own.

(iv) Called upon by the Lord to offer unto Him whatever the Āḷvār deems proper by way of expressing his gratitude to Him for sustaining in him such a strong conviction, the Āḷvār submits that there is nothing of his own to offer and even his soul actually belongs to Him. The Āḷvār says: "How can this insignificant self pay you back, the overlord of the exalted Devas? You are the incessant Benefactor and You are so full, above wants of any kind, that you need hardly anything from me. While there are those who care not for your favours and engage themselves in mad pursuit of food and raiment, there are also the silly brats who fancy that they have requited you for favours received at your hands".

teyva-nâyakaṉ, nâraṇaṉ, tirivikkiramaṉ aṭi-iṇaimicai
koy koḷ pūm poḻil cūḻ kurukūrc caṭakōpaṉ
ceyta âyirattuḷ ivai taṉ cirīvaramaṅkai mēya pattuṭaṉ
vaikal pāṭa vallār vaṉōrkku ārā-amutē. (V–7–11)

Translation

Those that zealously chant, with no break, these songs ten,
Which unto the Lord of Cirīvaramaṅkai pertain,
Out of the thousand composed by Caṭakōpaṉ
Of Kurukūr, adorned by many a flower garden,

Adoring the feet of Tiruvikkiramaṉ, the Lord Supreme,
Will unto Celestials be delectable like insatiable cream.

Note

Those that enter into the spirit of these ten songs, highlighting the Lord's boundless love for His devotees, whose reclamation is indeed His gain and His readiness to offer them His very feet, as their sole refuge (vide-V-7-10, the key-song), will indeed be highly delectable to the Nitya Sūris in Heaven.

Fifth Centum—Eighth Decad (V-8)
(Ārā-amutē)

Preamble

Despite the Āḷvâr's intense longing for communion with the Lord enshrined in Vāṉamāmalai, at whose feet he fell like an uprooted tree and sought refuge, he was not favoured with the Lord's presence. The Āḷvār now turns his attention to the Lord gracing Tirukkuṭantai (Kumbakonam in Tamiḷnâdu), hoping that He might be intending to grant him audience at that centre. The Āḷvār is contemplating with all the fervour at his command, the enchanting prospect of the Lord casting His sweet glances at him, conversing with him and gathering him up to His bosom, in sweet embrace. Akrūra was also in such a happy reminiscent mood during his journey to Vrindâvan to fetch Kṛṣṇa to Kamsa's court. Whereas Akrūra had his ambition duly fulfilled, the Āḷvâr has once again met with disappointment, like Bharata who could not prevail over Śrī Rāma to get back to Ayodhya from exile. Depressed like the babe, wanting to suck milk from the mother's breast, being denied access by the mother, the Āḷvār ends this decad on a despondent note, exclaiming that he just doesn't know how many more pilgrim centres he has still to knock at in this manner.

ārā-amutē! aṭiyēṉ uṭalam niṉpāl aṉpāyē,
nīrāy alaintu, karaiya urukkukiṉṟa neṭumālē!
cīr âr cennel kavari vīcum ceḻu nīrt tirukkuṭantai
ēr âr kōlam tikaḻak kiṭantāy! kaṇṭēṉ, emmāṉē! (V–8–1)

Translation

Oh, non-satiate Nectar, Your form enchanting does enthral
And thaw my body down; in Tirukkuṭantai, the land fertile,
With bracing climate, paddy fields rich and plenty of water,
I've seen you reclining, my Lord, sweet indeed are you beyond measure.

Notes

(i) This decad which opens by addressing the Lord as 'non-satiate Nectar', has always had a special fascination for the great Ācāryas of yore. The Supreme Lord is an inexhaustible fountain of bliss and it was but meet that Nammāḷvār addressed the Lord at Tirukkuṭantai as above. All the same, this appellation sounded unique unto one Lōkaśāraṅga mahāmuni who lived in North India. When he enquired of a sojourner from South India as to whether there was any special news from the South, the latter said that, in that part of the country, people were chanting Saint Nammāḷvār's Tiruvāymoḷi. When called upon by the Mahāmuni to cite a verse from the said work, the traveller said that he knew but one phrase, namely, "Ārā Amutē!" (non-satiate Nectar!). On hearing this sweet epithet, the Mahāmuni exlcaimed: "What! do they have an epithet like this also, when there are several others such as Nārāyaṇa etc.?" So saying, there and then, the Mahāmuni left for the holy land where this grand epithet of the Lord was current.

(ii) It is noteworthy that the Lord's enthralling Form at Tirukkuṭantai makes even the Āḷvār's body which is non-sentient, melt down in ecstasy, competing, as it were, with the Soul inside. Even as He is reclining on the Serpent-bed with eyes closed, it is very enchanting and one would want to enjoy it all the time. This is in dire contrast to us, humans, who present a trim appearance when we are up and moving, while, during sleep, we look very awkward indeed.

emmāṉē! eṉ veḷḷai-mūrtti! eṉṉai āḷvāṉē!
em mā uruvum vēṇṭum āṟṟāl āvāy! eḻil ēṟē!
cem mā kamalam ceḻu nīrmicaikkaṇ malarum tirukkuṭantai
am mā malarkkaṇ vaḷarkiṉṟāṉē! eṉ nāṉ ceykēṉē! (V–8–2)

Translation

You are the immaculate One that made me Your vassal,
Oh, charming Lord, assume You do any Form at Your sweet will;
In Tirukkuṭantai red lotus flower large blooms everywhere,
But You repose with Your lotus eyes closed; how can I endure?

Note

The Āḷvār sees the red lotus flowers in full bloom in the ponds of Tirukkuṭantai. But the lotus-eyed Lord doesn't open His eyes yet and greet the Āḷvār with sweet glances. This is more than the Āḷvār can bear. The Saint would expect quite a lot of favours from the Lord besides those already heaped on him. Although the Lord, in His iconic Form, does not, as a rule, open His mouth and speak or embrace the yearning devotee, yet the Āḷvār would want Him to make an exception in his case. If He could at least open His lotus-eyes and look at the Āḷvār, it would be some consolation for the latter. Otherwise, the Āḷvār cannot sustain himself. In the ponds, where the lotus flowers are in full bloom, the bees are feeding themselves snmptuously with honey but here is a bee (Āḷvār) languishing without food because the Lord's lotus-eyes still remain closed.

eṉ nāṉ ceykēṉ? yārē kaḷaikaṇ? eṉṉai eṉ ceykiṉṟāy?
uṉṉāl allāl yāvarālum oṉṟum kuṟai vēṇṭēṉ;
kaṇ ār matiḷ cūḻ kuṭantaik kiṭantāy! aṭiyēṉ aru vāḻnāḷ
cel nāḷ en nāḷ? an nāḷ uṉa tāḷ piṭittē celakkāṇē. (V–8–3)

Translation

Oh, Lord, reposing in Kuṭantai with parapet walls artistic,
What can I do and who shall my protector be?
What indeed do You propose to do with me?

Means other than You I crave not; pray let me stick
Unto Your feet during the days this vassal is still to eke.

Note

Finding the Lord unmoved by his ardent entreaties, the Āḻvār apprehends that the Lord expects him to fall back on other means and, therefore, puts the Lord the triple questions spelt out in lines 2 and 3 of this stanza. In essence, the Āḻvār asks the Lord whether He expects him to fend for himself or run after some one else seeking protection, or He would do the job Himself. Side by side, he has also clarified his position beyond any manner of doubt, namely, he has no other means but the Lord Himself. The Āḻvār's stand has been discussed threadbare in aphorism 46 of Śrīvacana Bhūṣaṇa against this particular background. It is reproduced below:

No doubt, the Lord had endowed the Āḻvār with supreme knowledge and yet, it was that very knowledge that stood in the way of his adopting any other means for attaining Him, as it would come into conflict with his essential nature as the Lord's vassal, solely dependent on Him. Even if he could overlook this basic objection and pursue other paths of discipline, the knowledge bestowed on him by the Supreme Lord was saturated with God-love (Bhakti)—intellectual love of God. It is this God-love that threw the Āḻvār into a state of ecstasy, precluding recourse to any means other than the Lord Himself, which would demand steady and constant physical and mental exercise.

celak kāṇkiṟpār kaṇum aḷavum cellum kīrttiyāy!
ulappu ilāṉē! ellā ulakum uṭaiya oru mūrtti!
nalattāl mikkār kuṭantaik kiṭantāy! uṉṉaik kāṇpāṉ, nāṉ
alappu āy, ākācattai nōkki, aḻuvaṉ; toḻuvaṉē. (V–8–4)

Translation

Oh, peerless Lord of all the worlds, Your traits auspicious soar
As high as one can see and even beyond, without end;

To behold Thee reposing in Kuṭantai where men of piety galore
Do dwell, I look at the sky, weep and in worship bend.

Note

The Āḻvār does not seek out the Lord in Heaven or in the Milky-ocean but the One in nearby Tirukkuṭantai. Seeing the Lord connotes not merely seeing His Form, as others do, but conversing with and embracing Him. The Āḻvār is gazing at the sky, hoping that the Lord would drop down, from above, as He did, to rescue Gajendra, the elephant in distress. The Āḻvār weeps like a child and worships like elders.

Aḻuvaṉ; toḻuvaṉ; āṭik kāṇpaṉ; pāṭi alaṟṟuvaṉ;
taḻu valviṉaiyāl pakkam nōkki, nāṇik kaviḻntiruppaṉ;
ceḻu oṇ paḻaṉak kuṭantaik kiṭantāy! centāmaraik kaṇṇā!
toḻuvaṉēṉai uṉa tāḷ cērumvakaiyē cūḻkaṇṭāy. (V–8–5)

Translation

My Lord, with red lotus-eyes, in Kuṭantai, rich and fertile,
You repose; I do cry, worship, sing, dance and prattle,
Feeling shy, my head I bend and enveloped in heavy sins,
I look for You in different directions; the ways and means
You should concert so that Your feet I do attain.

Notes

(i) The Āḻvar says that he has tried all methods at his disposal to induce the Lord's response, but in vain. The young ones cry out their needs and get them while the knowledgeable elders achieve their purpose through worship; the Āḻvār has tried both these methods. It is now up to the Lord to take him on to His feet.

(ii) The sins, referred to here, connote the Āḻvār's God-love remaining unreciprocated by the Lord.

cūḻkaṇṭāy eṉ tollai viṉaiyai aṟuttu; uṉ aṭicērum
ūḻ kaṇṭiruntē, tūrākkuḻi tūrttu, eṉai nāḷ akaṉṟu iruppaṉ?
vāḷ tol pukaḻār kuṭantaik kiṭantāy! vāṉōr kōmāṉē!
yāḻiṉ icaiyē! amutē! aṟiviṉ payaṉē! ariēṟē! (V–8–6)

Translation

Reposing in Kuṭantai of hoary fame, oh, Chief of Celestials,
You are the sweet strain from the lyre and delectable
Like nectar, the end of all knowledge You are, and grand
Like the lion and the bull; I am unto Your feet bound,
I know and yet sense-buried am I; from You apart
How long can I be? I pray unto You to cut out
My sins hoary and poor me unto Your fold admit.

Note

The Lord is unto the Āḻvār, the sum total of all things delicious, and he prays that the Lord should cut out the sins of one so deeply absorbed in Him, even as He did in the case of the chaste ones worshipping Him in Tirukkuṭantai. The ultimate aim of knowledge is to secure happiness and; the Lord is happiness itself.

ariēṟē! eṉ am poṉ-cuṭarē! ceṅkaṇ karu mukilē!
eri ēy pavaḷak kuṉṟē! nāl tōḷ entāy! uṉatu aruḷē
piriyā aṭimai eṉṉaik koṇṭāy! kuṭantait tirumālē!
tariyēṉ; iṉi uṉ caraṇam tantu, eṉ caṉmam kaḷaiyāyē.
(V–8–7)

Translation

My Lord of shoulders four, you stand
Like a coral mount, stellar-bound,
The golden beam lovely, oh, best of lions,
A blue mount you are, with red eyes lovely; by your grace,
You did enlist me in your service,
Oh, Sire, residing in Kuṭantai, no longer can I be apart
From you, pray cut out this body and grant me your feet.

Note

The Āḻvār's complaint is that, even after having induced in him God-love of such a high order, the Lord has kept him in this material body, instead of lifting him up to His feet. In nearby Kuṭantai, the Lord and His Divine Consort are gracing the votaries, enlisting them in Divine Service. Is it not odd that the Āḻvār should languish like a child, dying of hunger, right at the feet of the parents, rich and bounteous? The Āḻvār prays that he be granted the Lord's feet so that his body (earthly existence) may be cut out even as the babes are fed on the mother's breast prior to surgical treatment.

kaḷaivāy tuṉpam; kaḷaiyātu oḻivāy; kaḷaikaṇ maṟṟu ilēṉ;
vaḷai vāy nēmip paṭaiyāy! kuṭantaik kiṭanta mā māyā!
taḷarā uṭalam, eṉatu āvi carintu pōmpōtu
iḷaiyātu uṉa tāḷ oruṅkap piṭittup pōta icai nīyē. (V–8–8)

Translation

My wondrous Lord, reposing in Kuṭantai, when life ebbs out
Of my body worn out, let me by you be blest,
Oh, wielder of the discus lovely, with its mouth bent!
That I relax not my hold on your feet; whether or not
You do my miseries cut out, other than you I've no resort.

Notes

(i) The 'Prapanna', pursuing the path of loving surrender to the Lord's spontaneous grace, has to invoke the Lord's grace as the sole saviour, for deliverance from all ills and evils; he shall not knock at any door other than His, whatever be the provocation. Whether the Lord fulfils His part of the obligation or not, the Āḻvār will not budge from his avowed stand.

(ii) Why should the Lord not cut out the Āḻvār's ills despite His holding the discus, ever ready for going into action? This seems to be the Āḻvār's idea in referring to the Discus in the Lord's hand.

(iii) What indeed is the purpose of the Lord's manifestation in His iconic Form at Tirukkuṭantai, if not to cure the ills and evils of devotees like the Āḻvār? The Āḻvār invokes the Lord's grace, so that he may remain steadfast unto Him.

icaivittu eṉṉai uṉ tāḷ-iṇaikkīḻ iruttum ammāṉē!
acaivu il amarar talaivar talaivā! ātip peru mūrtti!
ticai vil vīcum ceḻu mā maṇikaḷ cērum tirukkuṭantai
acaivu il ulakam paravak kiṭantāy! kāṇa vārāyē. (V–8–9)

Translation

Chief Supreme of the eternal heroes in Heaven! Oh, primordial Lord,
Strayed I from You for long but unto Your feet, oh, Sire,
You have fathered me, inducing in me the desire therefor;
Reposing without break in Tirukkuṭantai where muster gems rare
And you are by the whole world adored,
Pray come down, my Lord, for me to behold.

Notes

(i) It is all due to the Lord's grace and age-long effort that the straying individual is brought round and made to submit to the Lord's protection, giving up all notions of self-ownership and self-protection. Having generated in the Āḷvār God-love of such great magnitude, the Lord should naturally follow it up by obliging Him with His presence. Having seen the Lord in repose, the Āḷvār now wants to behold and enjoy the Lord's majestic gait.

(ii) The lustrous gems assembled in Tirukkuṭantai obviously refer to luminaries like Tirumaḷisai Āḷvār.

vārā aruvāy varum eṉ māyā! māyā mūrttiyāy!
ārā amutāy! aṭiyēṉ āvi akamē tittippāy!
tīrā viṉaikaḷ tīra eṉṉai āṇṭāy! tirukkuṭantai
ūrāy! uṉakku āḷ-paṭṭum aṭiyēṉ iṉṉam uḻalvēṉō? (V–8–10)

Translation

My wondrous Lord of supernal Form, formless You stay in my mind
And sweeten it but Your insatiable Form alluring,
You won't unto me show; sins beyond cure
You destroyed and me, as Your vassal, did bind;

Oh, Lord, holding sway over Tirukkuṭantai,
Even as Your vassal, suffer still should I?

Notes

(i) The Āḷvār who was fondly hoping to enjoy the resplendent form of the Lord enshrined at Tirukkuṭantai, feels frustrated, as the Lord didn't come up to him and reveal His alluring Form, insatiable. The Āḷvār, therefore, asks the Lord whether He intends that he should knock at many more pilgrim centres.

(ii) When the Āḷvār addressed the Lord as 'Insatiable Nectar', it is not a mere vocal exercise; it goes right to the interior of his heart and sweetens it.

uḻalai eṉpil pēycci mulaiyūṭu avaḷai uyir uṇṭāṉ
kaḻalkaḷ avaiyē caraṇ ākak koṇṭa kurukūrc caṭakōpaṉ
kuḻaliṉ maliyac coṉṉa ōr āyirattuḷ ip pattum
maḻalai tīra vallār kāmar māṉ ēy nōkkiyarkkē. (V–8–11)

Translation

Those that thoroughly earn these songs ten;
Out of the thousand, sweeter than flute, composed by Kurukūr Caṭakōpaṉ
Who sought refuge at the feet of the Lord Who sucked
The tough-boned devil's life out of her breast, will be liked
By the doe-eyed damsels as their lovers dear.

Note

This end-stanza reveals that those who learn this decad throughly, will unto the Lord's devotees be as dear as the erotic lovers are unto their suitors. The doe-eyed damsels, obviously, refer to the Apsarās in Heaven, beyond the mischief of sensuality. The Āḷvār's intention could only be as explained above, as he is not the one to hark back to the domain of sensual pleasures. What is said in this stanza is a mere simile, not to be taken literally but applied to God and the Godly who would feel attracted to the chanters of this Tiruvāymoḷi.

Fifth Centum – Ninth Decad (V-9)
(Mān ēy nōkku)

Preamble

A frustrated Āḷvār turns his attention on yet another pilgrim centre, named Tiruvallavāḷ (in Kerala), the coveted communion with the Lord at Tirukkuṭantai not having materialised. Even so, he couldn't get there, being obsessed with the fragrance wafted across from there along with the breeze, the musical drone of the bees humming in the orchards over there, the vedic chantings etc. Thus stranded, *en route*, the Āḷvār assumes the state of Nāyakī who speaks out her infatuation to her mates. Of course, it is all mental experience and no physical movement, as such, is involved.

mān ēy nōkku nallīr! vaikalum viṉaiyēṉ meliya,
vāṉ ār vaṇ kamukum, maṭu mallikai kamaḻum
tēṉ ār cōlaikaḷ cūḻ tiru vallavāḷ uṟaiyum
kōṉārai aṭiyēṉ aṭikūṭuvatu eṉṟukolō? (V–9–1)

Translation

Ye, doe-eyed ladies, when will this vassal be blest to join
The Lord in Tiruvallavāḷ, with its orchards holding honey in plenty,
Where stand arecanut trees sky-high and jasmine sheds honey
And throws forward its fragrance fine, making this sinner thin down?

eṉṟukol-tōḻimīrkāḷ! emmai nīr nalintu eṉ ceytirō?
poṉ-tikaḻ puṉṉai, makiḻ, putu mātavi mītu aṇavi,
teṉṟal maṇam kamaḻum tiruvallavāḷ nakaruḷ
niṉṟa pirāṉ aṭiniṟu aṭiyōm koṇṭu cūṭuvatē? (V–9–2)

Translation

Ye, mates, does your tormenting me make any sense?
My mind is unto the Lord drawn, who in Tiruvallavāḷ stays
Where the southerly breeze does the fragrance sweet convey

From posh puṉṉai trees and their attractive kind;
When shall the dust from His feet anoint us indeed?

Notes

(i) The mates who were critical of the Nāyaki's attitude are reprimanded by her. She says that her mind is attracted by the Lord in Tiruvallavāḷ through the fragranc wafted from there. Having known her as well as they do they would do well to smear her head with the dust from the Lord's feet instead of trying to pull her back.

(ii) The Āḷvār's special fascination for the trees etc., in Tiruvallavāḷ, only typifies the great love and esteem in which the devout hold the several Pilgrim Centres where the Lord lovingly stays for the reclamation of His subjects. Their deep faith is reflected in their belief that the trees etc., in these centres, are but the angels of Heaven transplanted here and that this sportive Universe (Līla vibhūti) itself is but the garden lovingly raised by the Lord and His Divine Consort as a pastime. That was why one Jananātha Brahma Rāyar *alias* Allaḷapperumāḷ was pulled up by Śrī Empār when the former attempted to fell down trees in holy Śrīraṅgam, Empār is said to have questioned the Rāyar whether he intended to take liberties with the Lord's garden (Īśvara vibhūti).

cūṭu malarkkuḻalīr! tuyarāṭṭiyēṉ meliya,
pāṭum nal vēta oli paravait tirai pōl muḻaṅka,
māṭu uyarntu ōmap pukai kamaḻum taṉ tiruvallavāḷ
nīṭu uṟaikiṉṟa pirāṉ kaḻal kāṇṭumkol niccalumē? (V–9–3)

Translation

You, ladies, having tresses with flowers bedecked,
When can I, for ever, behold the feet of my Lord,
In cool Tiruvallavāḷ amid holy fires that send
Fumes sky-high and vedic chantings that resound
Like the billows of the sea, thinning this miserable one down?

Note

The mates, happily bedecked with flowers on their long locks, would expect the Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī to fall in line with them. But the Nāyakī is inclined otherwise; drawn towards Tiruvallavāḷ, with its sacred setting as above, she longs to behold the Lord's feet there for ever and anon. If the mates can tell her when and how she can realise her ambition, well and good; otherwise, they would do well to desist from criticising and pulling her up.

niccalum tōḷimirkāḷ! emmai nīr nalintu eṉ ceytirō?
paccilai niḷ kamukum, palavum, teṅkum, vāḻaikaḷum,
maccu aṇi māṭaṅkaḷ mītu aṇavum taṉ tiruvallavāḷ
naccu araviṉ aṇaimēl nampirāṉatu nal nalamē. (V–9–4)

Ye, mates, what do you gain by teasing me always?
Know ye, my good soul unto the Lord belongs, Who does repose
On serpent-bed and stays now in Tiruvallavāḷ, cool and nice,
With arecanut trees, green and tall, the plantains,
Jack and cocoanut trees hanging over the huge mansions.

Note

The Nāyakī tells her mates point-blank that she belongs to the Lord in Tiruvallavāḷ with its enchanting scenery and is, therefore, not free to respond to their wishes. It is no use trying to veer her round to their way of thinking and all their attempts will only prove futile. It was by revealing the charming setting in which He reposed on Ādiśeṣa (Serpent-bed) that the Lord initially attracted the Āḻvār. Therefore it is the Nāyakī pines for intimate service unto the Lord, emulating Ādi-Śeṣa.;

nal nalat tōḷimirkāḷ! nalla antaṇar vēḷvip pukai
main nalam koṇṭu uyar viṇ maṟaikkum taṉ tiruvallavāḷ
kaṉṉal am kaṭṭi-taṉṉai, kaṉiyai, iṉ amutam-taṉṉai,
eṉ nalam koḷ cuṭarai, eṉṟukol kaṇkaḷ kāṇpatuvē? (V–9–5)

Translation

My wholesome mates, when can I, the radiant Lord behold,
The candy flawless, the nectar, the fruit delicious, Who stole
My all, staying in cool Tiruvallavāḷ, where go up dense fumes, inky,
From the holy fires of vedic brahmins and hide the sky?

Note

Unlike the Mother and other elders who cannot see eye to eye with the Nāyakī, the mates know her mind well enough, although, now and then, they too try to get her round, seeing her extremely critical condition. That is why the Nāyakī finds the mates friendly and addresses them as such. She would want them to tell her when she could behold the Lord in Tiruvallavāḷ of ravishing charm in that highly delectable setting. The nectar obtained long back by churning the ocean (treated lightly by our Ācāryas as mere salt-extract) pales into insignificance, in comparison with the soul-stirring, soul-elevating Nectar, the Lord is unto the Nāyakī.

kāṇpatu eññāṉṟukolō viṉaiyēṉ-kaṉivāy maṭavīr!
pāṇ kural vaṇṭinoṭu pacun teṉṟalum āki, eṅkum
cēṇ ciṉai ōṅku marac ceḻuṅ kāṉal-tiruvallavāḷ
māṇ kuṟaḷ kōlap pirāṉ malart tāmaraip pātaṅkaḷē? (V–9–6)

Translation

Ye, charming mates, When can this sinner behold
The lotus feet of the lovely Midget Who has His abode
In Tiruvallavāḷ on the seashore, full of orchards fine,
Where plays all over cool, southerly breeze and tuneful bees drone.

Note

Although the Lord stays in this holy place as vāmana of bewitching beauty, with a happy blend of beauty and bounty (easy accessibility), yet His feet hold out a special charm to the Nāyakī who covets the lovely pair all the time, repeatedly mentioning them song after song.

pāṭaṅkaḷmēl aṇi pūn toḷak kūṭuṅkol-pāvai nallīr!
ōta neṭun taṭattuḷ uyar tāmarai, ceṅkaḻunīr,
mātarkaḷ vāḷ-mukamum kaṇṇum ēntum tiruvallavāḷ
nātaṉ, iñ ñālam uṇṭa nam pirāṉ-taṉṉai nāḷtoṟumē? (V–9–7)

Translation

Ye, charming mates, shall I worship daily the flowers at the feet
Of the benefactor great, who the worlds sustained during deluge
And now presides over Tiruvallavāḷ where the ponds huge
Are studded with flowers fine and the women wear faces bright?

Notes

(i) The bright faces and bewitching eyes of the womenfolk compete with the high class flowers in the ponds, lotus etc., and it is hardly possible to distinguish the one from the other.

(ii) The Lord's sustenance of the worlds, during the Deluge, is not merely a matter of past history but one of personal experience of the Āḻvār who has been redeemed by the Lord from the deluge of 'Samsāra' and elevated to the present pitch of devotion.

nāḷtoṟum vīṭu iṉṟiyē toḷak kūṭuṅkol-nal-nutalīr!
āṭu uṟu tīṅ karumpum viḷai cennelum āki eṅkum
māṭu uṟu pūn taṭam cēr vayal cūḻ taṉ tiruvallavāḷ
nīṭu uṟaikiṉṟa pirāṉ nilam tāviya nīḷ kaḻalē? (V–9–8)

Translation

Ye, mates with foreheads bright, shall I worship for ever
The feet of the Lord Who the worlds once spanned and now resides
In cool Tiruvallavāḷ with sweet sugar canes all over,
Ponds packed with flowers lovely and rich paddy fields along-side?

Notes

(i) Reference to the bright foreheads of the mates is but wishful thinking on the part of the Nāyakī who expects the Lord in Tiruvallavāḷ to come down where

she is, through the good offices of the mates. On the Lord's arrival the faces of the mates will naturally brighten up by way of expressing their gratitude to Him.

(ii) The Nāyakī pines for the continual worship of the feet of the Lord of loving condescension gracing Tiruvalla-vāḷ, cool and exhilarating.

kaḻal vaḷai pūrippa yām kaṇṭu kaitoḷak kūṭuṅkolō-
kuḻal eṉṉa, yāḻum eṉṉa, kuḷir cōlaiyuḷ tēṉ arunti
malalai vari vaṇṭukaḷ icai pāṭum tiruvallavaḷ
cuḻaliṉ mali cakkarap perumāṉatu tol aruḷē? (V–9–9)

Translation ;

Will the Lord, wielding the discus dynamic, shed His grace natural,
For me to joyously behold, with bangles well set and adore Him
That stays in Tiruvallavāḷ where pretty bees hum
Like flute or lyre, fed on honey from the orchards cool?

Note

The Nāyakī invokes the Lord's spontaneous grace for her to behold Him with great joy, her bangles well set on her wrist in the process and continually adore Him.

tol aruḷ nal viṉaiyāl colak kūṭuṅkol-tōḻimīrkāḷ!
tol aruḷ maṇṇum viṇṇum toḻa niṉṟa tirunakaram
nal aruḷ āyiravar nalaṉ ēntum tiruvallavāḷ
nal aruḷ nam perumāṉ nārāyaṇaṉ nāmaṅkaḷē? (V–9–10)

Translation

Ye, mates, shall Nārāyaṇaṉ's grace inborn on us descend
That we may His holy names recite? By His grace grand
He resides in gracious Tiruvallavāḷ, by Heaven and Earth adored,
Where thousands of brahmins, pious and gracious, have their abode.

Notes

(i) Tiruvallavāḷ is described here as the city of grace, adored alike by those on Earth and in Heavn. Actually, this description holds good in respect of all the pilgrim centes on Earth, where the Lord of limitless grace makes Himself visible and easily accessible to one and all, in His iconic (worshippable) Form, adored best of all His five manifestations.

(ii) Tender solicitude for His subjects is a remarkable trait of Lord Nārāyaṇa; the pious inhabitants of Tiruvallavāḷ are even more solicitous than the Lord,of the welfare of mankind and its uplift.

nāmaṅkaḷ āyiram uṭaiya nam perumāṉ aṭimēl
cēmam koḷ teṉ kurukūrc caṭakōpaṉ terintu uraitta
nāmaṅkaḷ āyirattuḷ ivai pattum tiruvallavāḷ
cēmam koḷ teṉ nakarmēl ceppuvār ciṟantār piṟantē. (V–9–11)

Translation

Those that can recite these songs ten, which laud
The glory of Tiruvallavāḷ, the walled city lovely,
Out of the thousand of Caṭakōpaṉ of Teṉkurukūr, well-laid,
Adoring the feet of the Lord with thousand names holy,
Will gain fame and distinction, though born in this land.

Note

Those that recite this decad will indeed gain fame and distinction, not attainable by other householders. They will not suffer from the disability the Āḻvār suffered and they can thus freely move round and visit the pilgrim centres. The thousand names (Sahasranāma), which actually connote not a mere thousand names but many more without number, depict the auspicious traits and glorious deeds of the Lord. The thousand songs composed by the Āḻvār who considers the Lord's feet as his sole Refuge also reflect the glory of His traits and deeds.

Fifth Centum—Tenth Decad (V-10)
(Piṟanta āṟum)

Preamble

Unable to reach the holy place of Tiruvallavāḷ, the Āḻvār contemplated the Lord enshrined there, from the outskirts of the holy city, as we saw in the last decad. The Saint thought, he would sustain himself by meditating on Lord Govinda's (Kṛṣṇa's) auspicious traits but it made him thaw down. And so, he prays unto the Lord in this decad to grant him at least the stamina to contemplate His glory and sustain himself, even if He would not oblige him with His company. For this purpose, he turns to the Lord in His Incarnate Form (Vibhava), having failed to realise his longing for communion with the Lord in His Arca (iconic) Form, in successive pilgrim centres.

On the face of it, the Āḻvār would appear to be moving in the reverse gear. The Lord's Arca (Workshippable) Form is intended to overcome the formidable handicaps and obstacles that confront one in worshipping Him in any of His other aspects of 'Para' 'Vyūha', Vibhava' and 'Antaryāmi'. And yet, the Alvar has recourse to the Lord's Incarnations, overlooking the time-lag, for the simple reason that the devotees could mingle with the Lord freely, converse and embrace during His Avatāras, unlike the 'Arca' where such exchanges are not possible, resulting in the Āḻvār's frustration. Even among the Incarnations it is noteworthy that all the Āḻvārs had a partiality for Kṛṣṇa. The illustrious Parāśara Bhaṭṭar explained this special preference, as follows:

The grief caused by one's bereavement loses its intensity with the passage of time, while the pangs are very acute when it is fresh. To the Āḻvārs, Kṛṣṇāvatāra was the nearest in point of time and hence, their lamentations. In the case of Saint Nammāḻvār, in particular, he missed the Kṛṣṇavatāra by a bare six weeks. Tradition has it that he came into this world just forty three days after Lord Kṛṣṇa's ascension to the Celestium. The Āḻvār cursed himself as a sinner, born six weeks late, missing the Kṛṣṇāvatāra like unto a delicious dish hitting the teeth and falling to the ground, while attempting to eat it. It was as if Kṛṣṇa had

left the pastoral township of Tiruvāyppāṭi by the North gate even as the Āḻvār was entering the place by the South gate.

piṟanta āṟum, vaḷarnta āṟum, periya pāratam kaiceytu, aivark
tiṟaṅkal kāṭṭiyiṭṭuc ceytu pōṉa māyaṅkaḷum, [kut
niṟam-taṉ ūṭu pukku eṉatu āviyai niṉṟu niṉṟu, urukki uṇkiṉṟa; Ic
ciṟanta vāṉ cuṭarē! uṉṉai eṉṟukol cērvatuvē? (V–10–1)

Translation ;

Oh, Lord of radiance beyond measure, The manner of Your birth,
The manner You grew up, Your wondrous military strategy
In the great battle of Bhārata leading the five to victory,
And Your return to Celestium thereafter, all these, taking one's breath,
Get into the vital region of my heart, sapping my soul
All the time; when indeed will You be joined by this vassal?

Note

After briefly touching upon the Lord's Avatāra as Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the Āḻvār deplores his inability to remain steady and recount His wonderful deeds, as they send him into a trance, touching as they do the inner core of his being. As a matter of fact, even as he contemplated the manner of the Lord's birth as Kṛṣṇa, entering the mother's womb as we, bound souls do, he fell into a trance which lasted six months. This song did not, therefore, progress beyond the opening phrase, 'the manner of Your birth' (as in the original text), for six motnths. Then again, he was struck by the way Kṛṣṇa grew up, how He was shifted from the place of birth the same night and brought up by a different set of parents, under cover, the odds and ends He had to contend against, right from infancy, the many miracles He wrought in the battle that ensued between the Pāṇḍavas and Kauravas, after His peace-parleys proved abortive, His functioning as Arujuna's charioteer and so on. Briefly put, in the inimitable language of Īṭu, the way Kaṇṇaṉ grew up was precisely the way the inimical ones were made to eat the dust and the friendly ones drank deep of His nectarean

charm (a continual feast for their eyes), gobbling up ghee and other milk products stored up in the pastoral township of Tiruvāyppāṭi (Gokula).

vatuvai vārttaiyuḷ ēṟu pāyntatum, māya māviṉai vāy piḷanta-
matuvai vār kuḻalār kuravai piṇainta kuḻakum, [tum,
atu itu utu eṉṉalāvaṉa alla; eṉṉai uṉ ceykai naivikkum;
mutu vaiya mutalvā! uṉṉai eṉṟu talaippeyvaṉē? (V–10–2)

Translation

Oh, Primate, your wondrous deeds do description baffle
And make me thaw down; pounce you did upon the bulls
When the talk of your wedding (Nappiṉṉai) was on,
The mouth of the treacherous fiend, horse-shaped, you tore open,
Dance you did merrily in the sweet company
Of those damsels whose locks shed plenty of honey;
When can I your lovely feet attain?

Note

The moment the challenging task of taming the seven unruly bulls, all at once, was set up as a pre-condition by the fair Nappiṉṉai's father for winning her hand, Kṛṣṇa dashed forward and pounced upon the animals, killing them all. Again, when Kṛṣṇa was in the company of the Gopis, a demon in the disguise of a horse came running fiercely to trample upon Him, but, with perfect case, He tore open the longish mouth of the treacherous horse and put an end to it. And then, there was the classical 'Rāsa Krīḍa' in which Kṛṣṇa assumed many forms and stood beside each Gopi, vide detailed notes given earlier about this *wonderful wonder of wonders.* There is hardly any need to single out any one of His many deeds. Each and every one of His deeds sends the Āḻvār into raptures and sweeps him off his feet. And so, he prays that he may atleast have the requisite stamina to sustain and steady himself, recount the Lord's glory and revel in it without breaking down.

peyyum pūṅ kuḻal pēy mulai uṇṭa piḷḷait tēṟṟamum, pērntu ōr
ceyya pātam oṉṟāl ceyta niṉ ciṟuc cēvakamum, [cāṭu iṟac
ney uṇ vārttaiyuḷ aṉṉai kōl koḷḷa, nī uṉ tāmaraik kaṇkaḷ nīr
malka,
paiyavē nilaiyum,—vantu eṉ neñcai urukkuṅkaḷē. (V–10–3)

Translation

The innocent looks on Your infant face as You sucked
The devil's breast, the juvenile valour of Your foot red that
kicked
The demon in the wheel, the fright You displayed with tears
In Your lotus eyes, when, before You, Your mother did appear
With stick in hand, to question You about stealing butter,
All these now do I in my mind envision, making it melt down!

Notes

(i) The infant looks of the Babe reveal His innocence, the inability to distinguish between the real mother and the Imposter.

(ii) The Babe had pinching hunger and cried for the mother's breast-milk, casually kicking the cart-wheel. But then, what a mighty kick it was and, that too, just from one foot of the tender Babe! The wheel broke into bits and with it, the demon who had taken possession of it-Juvenile valour indeed!

kaḷḷa vēṭattaik koṇṭu, pōy, puram pukka āṟum, kalantu acu-
uḷḷam pētam ceytiṭṭu, uyir uṇṭa upāyaṅkaḷum, [ṟarai
veḷḷa nīrc caṭaiyāṉum niṉṉiṭai vēṟualāmai viḷaṅka niṉṟatum,
uḷḷam uḷ-kuṭaintu eṉ uyirai urukki uṇṇumē. (V–10–4)

Translation

The form dubious You assumed (as Buddha) oh Lord!
And entry into the citadels three manoeuvred,
Mingling freely with the Asuras, their outlook You altered
And got them annihilated; (Śiva), with Gaṅgā on matted locks

In close unison with You, I behold and in my mind locked
Are all these, making my soul just melt down.

Notes

(i) The Āḻvar characterises the advent of Buddha as a mask put on by Lord Viṣṇu, in order to sow the seeds of doubt, dissension and heresy among the Asuras (who were very powerful, by dint of their rigorous rituals, but most unscrupulous and destructive), with a view to reducing their prowess and strength and getting them annihilated thereby. The story of Buddha, as recorded in the third Amśa of Śrī Viṣṇu Purāṇa, is as follows:

Once upon a time, the Asuras invoked Śiva by their rigorous austerities and when he appeared before them and enquired of them what they wished to have, they asked for three cities, invulnerable to attack from any source. While granting their wish, Śiva warned that the cities should always move in the air without touching each other and if ever they chanced to collide, great misfortune would befall them. The three cities, one made of iron, another of silver and the third of gold, came into existence forthwith. Living in these flying citadels, the demons waged war against the Devas and the Brahmins who offered libations to the latter. Deprived of the sacrificial offerings from the Brahmins, the strength of the Devas dwindled and they fell an easy prey to the Asuras. When requested by the Devas to destroy the Asuras who posted themselves with their flying citadels at all places where sacrifices were performed, molested and slew the performers, Śiva declined to fell the three, he himself had planted, even if it be poisonous. Thereafter, the Devas went with their tale of woe to Viṣṇu, resting on the Milky ocean and begged of Him to destroy the demons. Queried by the Lord whether the Devas and the Brahmins could not, with their combined might, destroy the demons, the Devas clarified that the Asuras were invincible because they too performed rites and rituals and sacrifices and gained strength, all the time.

Assuring the Devas that He would destroy the demons, the Lord proceeded to the cities of the demons, disguised as an aged Buddha (wise man), carrying a book under his arm and wearing a twisted Kuśā grass round his finger, ring-like. He preached to them morals in a telling manner, and they had no hesitation in adopting Him as their mentor (wise counsellor). When they began performing some Yâga (ceremonies), Buddha accosted them: "What are these sticks for?" Pat came the reply, "For offering into the fire", evoking the observation from Buddha that it was better to be born a grass-eating cow than a stick-eating fire. Likewise, Buddha enquired the purpose for which huge stocks of food had been kept in the venue of the Yâga. When He was told that it was all meant to be offered to the Gods, He spoke derisively that it would be nice to do so if they could satisfy the hunger of a traveller by feeding some one at home. Buddha asked next why the goats were kept there and elicited the reply that the omentum extracted from the animals would be offered to the Gods. Buddha remarked, "Oh, I see, butchers seem to be the righteous people then!" By means of such preachings, Buddha succeeded in cajoling the demons and with their faith in the sacrifices and their efficacy shaken, they gave them up altogether. They even began to revile Śiva, their great benefactor, and this reached his ears through Buddha. The irate Śiva resolved to destroy the ungrateful demons. In the battle that ensued, the Earth became the chariot, the sun and Moon, its wheels, the four vedas were the horses, Brahmā, the charioteer, Mahā-Meru, the mountain was used as the bow and Âdiśeṣa, the bow-string. Thus equipped, the vile demons were exterminated by Śiva. The old order of things was restored whereby the Devas and the Brahmins could live in peace, the latter providing the former with their usual sacrificial offerings.

The authoritative texts (Mahā Bhārata, Karṇa parva) declare 'Viṣṇurātmā Bhagavato bhavasyāmita tejasaḥ' and true to this, Śiva could conquer the demons only through Lord Viṣṇu, his Internal Controller. This is

precisely what the Āḷvār intends to convey when he refers to Śiva standing in close unison with the Lord. This Buddha should not, however, be confounded with Śāṅkhya Muni (Gautama), born about 2,500 years ago.

(ii) Read also the arguments, Sage Jābāli advanced in Rāmāyaṇa (II-108), to induce Śrī Rāma to get back to the Kingdom, giving up the exile imposed on Him by His father. Śrī Rāma had, however, no hesitation in castigating the sage for his specious advice, wide apart from Dharma, about which Śrī Rāma had a very clear conception.

(iii) The accord of Śiva with Viṣṇu, referred to here, denotes the intimate relationship between the two, as Body and Soul respectively, the latter being the 'Antarātmā' or the Inner Soul of the former. It is worth recalling, in this connection, the dialogue between Kūratāḷvāṉ and king Kṛmikaṇṭa cōla in the Royal Court. When the king insisted that Kūratāḷvāṉ should subscribe to the bull that Śivā is the Supreme Truth, Āḷvāṉ pointed out, quoting chapter and verse, that Śiva derived all the power he had only from the Paramount Lord of the Cosmos, Viṣṇu. Āḷvāṉ would not sign the order, as commanded by the King and chose to submit himself to the inquisitorial torture of the bigoted king. ("Blessed are they that suffer persecution for the sake of justice, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven".—*Bible*)

uṇṇi vāṉavar-kōṉukku āyar oruppaṭutta aṭicil uṇṭatum,
vaṇṇa māl varaiyai eṭuttu maḻai kāttatum, [māyaṅkaḷ
maṇṇai muṉ paṭaittu, uṇṭu, umiḻntu, kaṭantu, iṭantu, maṉanta
eṉṉumtōṟum, eṉ neñcu erivāy meḻuku okkum niṉṟē. (V–10–5)

Translation

Like wax set on fire, my mind does melt
Whenever I meditate on the Lord's wondrous deeds
How He consumed all the food by the cowherds set
Unto Devas' chief, how He did the rains repel,
Holding the lovely mount aloft, how, in the days of old,

He did the worlds create, ate and spat, spanned and pulled
Them out of the waters deep and did (Mother Earth) wed.

Note

The Āḷvār says that his mind thaws down in contemplation of the Lord's wondrous deeds, those performed for the general weal of the Universe, as well as specially directed towards the amelioration of His ardent devotees.

niṉṟa āṟum, irunta āṟum, kiṭanta āṟum niṉaippu-ariyaṉa;
oṉṟu alā uruvu āy, aruvu āya niṉ māyaṅkaḷ [yēṟku
niṉṟu niṉṟu niṉaikkiṉṟēṉ; uṉṉai eṅṅaṉam niṉaikiṟpaṉ? pāvi-
oṉṟu naṉku uraiyāy, ulakam uṇṭa oṇ cuṭarē! (V–10–6)

Translation

The manner in which You stood in one place, sat in another,
And reposed in yet another, these and several other
Wonders indefinable are indeed beyond my mind's reach,
Ponder do I over them little by little; You, I beseech,
Oh, resplendent Lord, Who the worlds once gulped down,
To grant this sinner, strength to meditate without wearing down

Note

(i) The places where the Lord stood, sat and reposed, not having been specified in this Song, the Ācāryas take delight in interpreting this in a number of ways, as elucidated below:

I Standing

(Incarnate Forms)

Śrī Rāma *standing* at the entrance to Laṅka with bow in hand;

The victorious Rāma *standing* with bow in hand after slaying Vāli;

Śrī Kṛṣṇa *standing*, holding mount Govardhan aloft;

Śrī Kṛṣṇa *standing* inside the cradle, holding on to the side-rods;

(Iconic Form)

Standing

In Mount *Tiruveṅkaṭam*, *Ūrakam*, *Śrī Vaikuṇṭam* etc.

II. Sitting

(Incarnate Forms)

Śrī Rāma *sitting* in *citrakūṭ* and other places; Śrī Kṛṣṇa *sitting* in the cradle, unable to stand any longer.

(Transcendent Form)

Sitting in the High Heavens on the Serpent-Couch.

(Iconic Form)

Sitting in *Pāṭakam*, *Varakuṇamaṅkai* etc.;

III. Reposing

(i) *Incarnate Forms*

Śrī Rāma, *reposing*, in front of the ocean;

Śrī Kṛṣṇa *reposing* on the laps of the Gopis, just before the commencement of Rāsakrīda;

Śrī Kṛṣṇa reposing in the cradle, as a tender Babe,

(ii) *Vyūha*

The Lord *reposing* in the Milky-ocean, in Yoga Niddhrā;

(iii) *Iconic Form*

Reposing in *Tiruvekkā*, *Puḷiṅkuṭi*, *Tirukkuṭanta*, *Śrīraṅgaṁ-Anantaśayanam* etc.

(ii) Although the Incarnations took place long ago, it should still be possible to meditate on them even at this distance of time. But the wondrous deeds of the Lord are too numerous to be narrated, with any degree of cogency and precision and, in the case of the Āḷvār, he is unable to study himself and recount them without wearing down. And hence, the prayer, as in this song.

(iii) The Lord's wondrous deeds and the different postures assumed by Him at various centres, have been mentioned here by the Āḻvār, only to stress His gracious response to the devotees who give their hearts to Him. It would, therefore, be relevant to cite the following anecdote to illustrate the manner and extent of the Lord's approach to us, when we will but take one step towards Him.

A certain devotee, proficient in singing, came all the way to Śrīraṅgam from the far north, longing to worship Lord Raṅganātha. When he went to the temple, it was the concluding day of a certain festival. Āḻvār Tiruvaraṅkapperumāḷ Araiyar, the Temple Bard, chanted a hymn of Toṇṭaraṭippoṭi Āḻvār before Lord Raṅganātha with great feeling and literally coaxed the Lord's pleasure. The Lord was highly pleased with His Minstrel and seemed readily inclined to do the latter's bidding. At this ripe moment, the Araiyar introduced the devout visitor from the North, who had covered, on foot, more than two thousand miles, and prayed for the Lord's condescension to honour the visitor with a special recognition of his great devotion unto Him. The Lord immediately responded by walking four paces of a rod length each (uyyāra naṭai) in the hands of His holy bearers, from the laurel tree in the cloisters of the temple. Addressing the Holy choir, the Lord enquired: "Come, Ye, holy chanters, tell us whether what we have done is adequate to the pains taken by this northern supplicant of ours". Here then is the tradition highlighting the truth that, when man ascends to the God's foot-stool, God descends to the soul of man.

oṉ cuṭarōṭu iruḷumāy niṉṟa āṟum, uṉmaiyōṭu iṉmaiyāy vantu, eṉ
kaṇ koḷāvakai nī karantu, eṉṉaic ceykiṉṟaṉa
eṉ koḷ cintaiyuḷ naikiṉṟēṉ; eṉ kariya māṇikkamē! eṉ kaṇkaṭkut
tiṇ koḷḷa oru nāḷ aruḷāy, uṉ tiru-uruvē. (V-10-7)

Translation

My Lord of sapphire hue, with all radiance You shine
In my heart and yet, outside You aren't seen,

And 'tis darkness indeed; 'tween such contradictions torn,
I ponder which is true and which is false and dwindle;
Once in a way let me see Your Form tangible.

Note

The Āḻvār prays unto the Lord who has blest him with perpetual light inside, the glorious mental vision of the Divine, to make Himself perceptible to the external senses as well, at least once in a way. The Lord does exist for the devout and sheds light on them while He does not exist so far as the sceptical unbelievers are concerned and non-existence of God is but synonymous with darkness or blindness. For the conflicting individuals these contradictions do exist.

tiru-uruvu kiṭanta āṟum, koppūḻc centāmaraimēl ticaimukaṉ
karuvuḷ vīṟṟiruntu paṭaittiṭṭa karumaṅkaḷum, [niṉṟu nekku,
poru il uṉ taṉi nāyakam avai kēṭkumtōṟum, eṉ neñcam
aruvi cōrum kaṇṇīr; eṉ ceykēṉ aṭiyēṉē? (V-10-8)

Translation

Your exquisite form in repose (on the Milk-ocean),
The emergence, from the lotus stalk on your navel, of (Brahmā) Ticaimukaṉ,
For the creation of the worlds, pervaded by you as Internal Controller,
All these proclaiming your glory peerless, I hear (the Vedantins utter),
My mind m lting down in ecstasy and into torrential tears
Do my eyes break; oh, how can this vassal hold up?

Note

The Āḻvār is simply overwhelmed by the Lord's transcendent glory and, in an unsteady frame of mind charged with great emotion, he is unable to do any sustained thinking, clear and cogent.

aṭiyai mūṉṟai iranta āṟum, aṅkē niṉṟu āḻ kaṭalum maṇṇum
muṭiya īr aṭiyāl muṭittukkoṇṭa mukkiyamum, [viṇṇum
noṭiyumāṟu avai kēṭkumtōṟum, eṉ neñcam niṉ-taṉakkē karaintu ukum;
koṭiya valviṉaiyēṉ-uṉṉai eṉṟukol kūṭuvatē? (V–10–9)

Translation

Your great glory by the devout recounted, I do hear,
How You (from Bali) sought land of three strides,
The unique valour with which You did cover
The Earth, the ocean deep and the Heaven, in two strides
And my mind, in You absorbed, thaws down; sinner heavy
That I am, when will I on You meditate, calm and steady?

kūṭi nīraik kaṭainta āṟum, amutam tēvar uṇṇa, acurarai
vīṭum vaṇṇaṅkaḷē ceytu pōṉa vittakamum,
ūṭu pukku, eṉatu āviyai urukki uṇṭiṭukiṉṟa; niṉ-taṉṉai
nāṭum vaṇṇam collāy, naccu nāku-Aṇaiyāṉē! (V–10–10)

Translation

Oh, Lord on serpent-bed, the way You churned the Milky ocean,
In conjunction with Devas and Asuras but gave the nectar
To Devas alone, keeping Asuras away, deep into my Soul enters
This scheming wonder of yours and waters it down;
Say how I can Your glory contemplate without breaking down.

Note

The fickle-minded Asuras gave up their bid for the nectar that came from the Milky ocean, when they beheld Lord Viṣṇu's Mohini Avatāra of ravishing feminine charm and ran after the strange Visitor. Contemplating this wonderful sequence of events, the Āḻvār thaws down in wonderment and prays that he should be enabled to meditate on Him with that steadiness with which Ādiśeṣa serves Him. Reference to the Lord's serpent-bed is thus quite significant.

nāku-aṇaimicai nam pirāṉ caraṇē caraṇ namakku eṉṟu nāḷ
ēka cintaiyanāyk kurukūrc caṭakōpaṉ māṟaṉ [toṟum
āka nūṟṟa antāti āyirattuḷ ivaiyum ōr pattum vallār
māka vaikuntattu makiḻvu eytuvar vaikalumē. (V–10–11)

Translation

Those that chant these songs ten
Out of the thousand composed by Caṭakōpaṉ
Of Kurukūr for his edification, with singular devotion
Unto to the Lord on Serpent-bed, whom he looked upon
As his sole refuge, will enjoy bliss eternal in high heaven.

Note

Ādiśeṣa, the Lord's couch *cum* bed will not allow the Lord to give up the supplicants and therefore it is that the Āḻvār seeks to take advantage of this favourable combination.

THE CENTUM, IN RETROSPECT
(DECAD-WISE SUMMARY)

(V-1): The Āḻvār draws the searchlight inward, to discover the root-cause of the extraordinary grace showered on him by the Lord, whereby he could not merely stand apart from the worldlings, without wallowing as one of them but also advise and correct them. Finding, however, that, even for a mere show of piety, devoid of genuine love for him, the Lord has condescended to open up the flood-gates of His grace on him, without caring in the least to go beneath the skin and expose his hollowness, the Āḻvār just marvels, *in the opening decad of this Centum*, at the Lord's overwhelming grace and gives vent to his wonderment;

(V-2): The Āḻvār having weaned the people from propitiating minor deities, through his splended exposition of the supremacy of Mahāviṣṇu in IV-10, this abode has now become a land of bliss, hardly distinguishable from Heaven. A golden era has thus been ushered in here, attracting ever the denizens of the upper worlds to this land, to behold and admire this new state of affairs. It is such an exhilarating milieu that the Alvar hails, *in the second decad*, besides envisioning the advent of Tirumaṅkai Āḻvār and Saint Rāmānuja, in the days to come, the veritable destroyers of the ungoldly forces of Kaliyuga;

(V-3): Reverting to the 'Nāyaki' state, which obtained during the three consecutive decads (6 to 8) of the fourth Centum, the Āḻvār is seen, *in the third decad,* all agog to get united with the Lord or at least procure from Him the tulaci garland and wear it on her locks. Non-fulfilment of her intense longing, however, induces her to contemplate the drastic step of embarking on what is known as 'Maṭal' in Tamil literature, that is, coming into the open and carrying her tale of woe to the public at large, so that the cruelly unresponsive Lord could be arraigned at the bar of public opinion and the union with Him got accelerated.

(V-4): In order to put through the proceedings, contemplated in the preceding decad, the Nāyakī has to, first of all, draw a sketch of her lover (the accused), for public exhibition. But it is pitch dark and she cannot draw the picture. It is an unusually long night, dark and dewy. The whole world is fast asleep and the Nāyakī has no company. Against this background, the Nāyakī is seen, *in the fourth decad,* having recourse to the contemplation of the Lord's auspicious traits, soothing her aching heart;

(V-5): *The fifth decad* is sung by the Āḻvār, while still in the feminine state. The Sun having risen, at long last, the Nāyakī could enjoy, in her mind's eye, the glorious vision of the Lord, in His Iconic Form at Tirukkuruṅkuṭi (also known as Vaiṣṇava Vāmana Kṣetra). The elders, who tried to bring the Nāyakī round, by admonishing her, are hit back by her, questioning the propriety of their admonishing one whose heart stands rivetted to the exquisite Form of the Lord at Tirukkuruṅkuṭi;

(V-6): The gnostic mother finds Parāṅkuśa Nāyaki (Āḻvār), seated like a discourser, with the fingers in an instructional pose and declaring that she had created the whole world, that she would become the world herself and so on. Queried by her kinsmen, the bewildered mother says that the Nāyakī is perhaps possessed by the Supreme Lord, who is the Inner Self of all beings. Every song *in the sixth decad* is in two distinct parts, namely, the narration of the Nāyakī's God-vision (Man identified with God), followed by the mother's suggestion that it is perhaps God who has taken possession of the Nāyakī, that speaks through her;

(V-7): The Lord is still keeping Himself away from the Āḻvār, although, on previous occasions, He obliged the Āḻvār with His presence (mental vision of course), whenever the Āḻvār's longing for such communion was far-too-intense. Pondering within himself, the Āḻvār apprehends that the Lord might either want him to adopt other means, such as 'Karma Yoga', 'Jñāna Yoga', and 'Bhakti Yoga or intend to give him up on the ground that he was pursuing other means, instead of looking upon Him as the Sole Means. *In the seventh decad,* the Āḻvār, therefore, hastens to clarify his true stand in this regard, at the feet of the Lord enshrined in Vāṉamāmalai, also known as Cirīvaramaṅkalanakar, deep south in Tamil Nāḍu;

(V-8): In the seventh decad, the Āḻvār fell, like an uprooted tree, at the feet of the Lord enshrined in Vāṉamāmalai and sought refuge and yet, he

was not favoured with the Lord's presence. The Alvar, therefore, turns his attention, *in the eighth decad,* to the Lord gracing Tirukkuṭantai (Kumbakōṇam in Tamil Nāḍu), hoping that He might be intending to grant him audience at that centre. The Āḻvār is contemplating, with all the fervour at his command, the enchanting prospect of the Lord casting sweet glances at him, conversing with him and gathering him up to his bosom in sweet embrace. The Āḻvār has, however, met with disappointment once again and he ends this decad on a despondent note, exclaiming that he just does not know how many more pilgrim centres he has still to knock at in this manner.

(V-9): *In the ninth decad,* we see a frustrated Āḻvār turning his attention on yet another pilgrim centre, named Tiruvallavāḻ (in Kerala), his coveted union with the Lord at Tirukkuṭantai, not having materialised. Even so, he could not get there, being obsessed with the fragrance wafted across from there, the lovely breeze, the musical drone of the bees humming in the orchards over there, the Vedic chantings, etc. Thus stranded, the Āḻvār assumes the state of Nāyakī and speaks out her infatuation to her mates;

(Of course, it is all mental experience and no physical movement, as such, is involved.)

(V-10): *In the concluding decad of this Centum,* the Āḻvār prays unto the Lord to grant him at least the stamina to contemplate His glory and sustain himself, even if He would not oblige him with his company. Having failed to realise his longing for communion with the Lord in His Iconic Form, in successive pilgrim centres, the Alvar turns to the Lord in His incarnate Form, overlooking the time-lag for the simple reason that the devotees could freely mingle with the Lord, during His Incarnations, converse and embrace, unlike the 'Arca' (iconic manifestation), where such exchanges are not possible. Even among the Lord's many incarnations, the Āḻvār has a partiality for the proximate Kṛṣṇāvatār, the manner in which He was born and the way He grew up, touching the inner core of his being and sending him unto a trance.

BOOK VI

Sixth Centum First Decad (VI-1)
(Vaikal pūṅ kaḻivāy)

Preamble

We saw in the preceding centum from V-7 and onwards the Āḷvār seeking refuge in successive Pilgrim centres, at the feet of the Lord enshrined there. If the surrender at the feet of the Lord which should yield the result as a matter of course, did not meet with immediate response from the Lord, it was because He willed that the contemporary world as well as posterity should benefit through the Āḷvār's scintillating hymns flowing from his sweet lips. It is indeed our great good fortune that the Āḷvār was not immediately lifted up to Heaven. In V-10, the Alvar prayed intensely for the acceleration of his union with the Lord and now he seeks out the Lord at Tiruvaṇvaṇṭūr, a pilgrim centre in Keralā, but is too feeble to reach that place. The next best he could do in such a forlorn state, was to acquaint the Lord with his critical condition through some one. The Āḷvār, once again, gets tranformed as a Nāyakī and sends some birds and bees to convey her message to the Lord. The birds, with their pair of wings, typify the devout, endowed with *great knowledge* and *good conduct*, the efficient Preceptors, with a happy blending of these two essential requisites, for serving as an effective medium between Man and God.

This technique of the Āḷvār sending messages to the Lord through birds, bees etc., has already been elaborated upon, vide preamble to I-4. There are four decads, in the whole work, where such messages are sent, the other three being I-4, VI-8 and IX-7. Whereas the message in I-4 was sent to the Lord in His 'Vyūha' aspect at the Milky ocean, the seat of His creative activity, the present one is held to have been addressed to the Lord in His 'Vibhava' or Incarnate Forms. As the message is being sent to the Lord in His 'Arca' (Iconic) Form at Tiruvaṇvaṇṭūr, it might be questioned how the Āḷvār is stated to have sent emissaries to the Lord in His Incarnate Forms. The clue for this can be had from the tenth stanza of this decad, where the Āḷvār specifically mentions Śrī Rāma, stationed at that pilgrim centre. Further, the

message in the last of the four decads, referred to above, namely, IX-7, is addressed to the Lord in His *Arca* (Iconic) Form and there is hardly any need for duplication in this regard. In I-4, the Āḻvār invoked the Lord's special trait of forgiveness, while, in this decad, the accent is on His pledge, the creed of extending protection to His devotees, seeking Him ardently, vide also aphorism 156 of 'Ācārya Hṛdayaṁ'.

vaikal pūṅ kaḻivāy vantu, mēyum kurukiṉaṅkāḷ!
cey koḷ cennel uyar tiruvaṉvaṇṭūr uṟaiyum
kai koḷ cakkarattu eṉ kaṉivāyp perumāṉaik kaṇṭu,
kaikaḷ kūppi, collīr-viṉaiyāṭṭiyēṉ kātaṉmaiyē. (VI–1–1)

Translation

Ye herds of Heron, always seeking food in water-logged land!
Go unto my Lord with fruit-like lips and discus in hand,
Who does for ever in Tiruvaṉvaṇṭūr reside,
Where there are plenty of rich paddy fields;
And convey the depth of this sinner's love, with your hands, folded.

Notes

(i) The Nāyakī describes the place to which the herons have to go and the hard-hearted Lord to whom they have to report her unique love, emanating from a tender heart. The description of the destination should indeed tempt the birds, for there too, they can have plenty of food. Hard-hearted though He might be, the Nāyakī cannot lift her mind from His fascinating lips and that too, on the heels of her enjoyment of Kṛṣṇāvatār, in the immediately preceding decad.

(ii) The inner meaning of this song, as brought out in aphorism 154 of 'Ācārya Hṛdayaṁ' is given below:

An Ācārya (Preceptor) of spotless purity in and out, who revels in God-enjoyment in the company of his inseparable disciples and attends pious gatherings along with them, is being sought out, as an efficient medium for securing communion with the Lord.

(iii) The Āḻvār, who had tasted the Lord's condescending love and amazing simplicity during those blissful moments of union with Him, is now inclined to disdain Him for His aloofness, the predominant trait of His transcendent (Paratva) aspect. This is reflected in her warning to the birds to approach the Lord with folded hands, with due regard to His might and majesty.

kātal meṉ peṭaiyōṭu uṭaṉ mēyum karu nārāy!
vēta vēḷvi oli muḻaṅkum taṉ tiruvaṉvaṇṭūr
nātaṉ, ñālam ellām uṇṭa nam perumāṉaik kaṇṭu,
pātam kaitoḻutu, paṇiyir-aṭiyēṉ-tiṟamē. (VI–1–2)

Translation

Oh, Stork of complexion fine, move you do in search of food,
With your beloved mate; go and report my condition, with hands folded,
Unto my Lord, Master of the Universe, Who sustained the worlds
During deluge and now in cool Tiruvaṉvaṇṭūr resides
Amid vedic chantings and rituals with a flourish of trumpets loud.

Notes

(i) The Nāyakī is commissioning a stork to go and reverently report her condition at the feet of the Lord who stands pledged to redeem His ardent votaries, but now remains wholly absorbed in the vedic chantings and rituals put through with great eclat in Tiruvaṉvaṇṭūr by its pious brahmins. It is said of Śrī Rāma that He would be present wherever vedic chantings and ritualistic proceedings were going on.

(ii) It is noteworthy that the Nāyakī advises her emissary to prostrate at the feet of the Lord. This could either reflect her attitude, already commented upon, in para (iii) of the notes below the preceding song or stress the correct code of conduct. It is no use paying obeisance without actually prostrating before the worship-worthy. The great Nañciyar used to say: "Whenever I saw a

devotee of Viṣṇu and I fell at his feet with my head touching them, it was only then, I felt as if I ate my fill and all my hunger vanished".

tiṟaṅkaḷ āki eṅkum ceykaḷ ūṭu uḻal puḷḷinaṅkāḷ!
ciṟanta celvam malku tiruvaṉvaṇṭūr uṟaiyum
kaṟaṅku cakkarak kaik kaṉivāyp perumāṉaik kaṇṭu,
iṟaṅki, nīr toḻutu, paṇiyīr-aṭiyēṉ iṭarē. (VI-1-3)

Translation

Ye, birds flocking together all over the flush fields,
Go and submit at the feet of my red-lipped Lord, Who wields
The revolving discus and in Tiruvaṉvaṇṭūr resides,
The abode of riches in plenty, how in misery this vassal fades.

Note

It is the natural habit of the birds to flock together and go hither and thither, in search of food but the God-infatuated Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī thinks that they are also moving about in search of God, out of consideration for her. c.f. II-1. She tells the birds that the Lord whom they are after, resides in Tiruvaṉvaṇṭūr and advises them to go and meet Him there and, after making a low obeisance to Him, reverently report her miserable condition also. The birds ask the Nāyakī how the Lord could stay at that centre, forgetting all about her and the Nāyakī clarifies at once that it is the immense wealth of the place that has kept Him engrossed with it. whereas for her there is no greater wealth than her Lord, the 'Śṛya śṛyaṁ'.

iṭar il pōkam mūḻki, iṇaintu āṭum maṭa aṉṉaṅkāḷ!
viṭal il vēta oli muḻaṅkum taṉ tiruvaṉvaṇṭūr
kaṭaliṉ mēṉippirāṉ, kaṇṇaṉai, neṭumālaik kaṇṭu,
uṭalam naintu, orutti urukum eṉṟu uṇarttumiṉē. (VI-1-4)

Translation

Ye, modest swans, in joy immersed and to misery unknown!
Go and meet the Lord Supreme, the sea-hued Benefactor great,
Who, in cool Tiruvaṉvaṇṭūr resides, where do reverberate
Vedic chantings and report, 'Here's a woman dwindling down'.

Notes

Addressing the swans who always move in strength and have never, therefore, known the pangs of separation from each other, the Nāyakī asks them to go to Tiruvaṉvaṇṭūr and tell her Lord that here, at this end, is a woman languishing miserably, due to separation from Him.

The swans, immersed in joy and flocking together, denote those in incessant communion with the Lord, speaking the same language (*i.e.*) the language of rapturous devotion, as the Āḻvārs did.

uṇarttal ūṭal uṇarntu, uṭaṉ mēyum maṭa aṉṉaṅkāḷ!
tiṇartta vaṇṭalkaḷmēl caṅku cērum tiruvaṉvaṇṭūr
puṇartta pūṉ taṇ-tuḻāy muṭi nam perumāṉaik kaṇṭu,
puṇartta kaiyiṉarāy, aṭiyēṉukkum pōṟṟumiṉē. (VI-1-5)

Translation

Ye, inseparable swans, against the ill-effects of separation forewarned!
Go to our Sire, with cool tuḻaci garland on His crown adorned,
Who resides in Tiruvaṉvaṇṭūr, on whose soft sands
Conches converge and worship Him, on my behalf also, with folded hands.

Notes

(i) Estrangement on some slight pretext, followed by reconciliation, culminating in union between the lover and the beloved, are factors which commonly characterise connubial relationship. The swans, moving always together, do not, however, have to pass through these vicissitudes.

(ii) The Nāyakī's request to the swans to worship the Lord on her behalf as well and sing the song of benediction unto Him, sets the pace for those who are not fortunate enough to visit the various pilgrim centres but keenly

miss the bliss. These persons request the fortunate visitors to those places to worship on their behalf also. It is not exactly worship by proxy but the expression of one's yearning for worship.

pōṟṟi yāṉ irantēṉ, puṉṉaimēl uṟai pūṅ kuyilkāḷ!
ceṟṟil vāḷai tuḷḷum tiruvaṇvaṇṭūr uṟaiyum
āṟṟal āḻi aṅkai amarar-perumāṉaik kaṇṭu,
māṟṟam koṇṭaruḷīr-maiyal tīrvatu oruvaṇṇamē. (VI–1–6)

Translation

I pray unto ye, lovely koels, dwelling up the laurel trees,
To meet the Lord of the Celestials, wielding the powerful discus
Who, in Tiruvaṇvaṇṭūr resides, where revel the fishes
In marshy lands and bring unto me heartening news.

Note

Up the laurel trees: The laurel (Puṉṉai in Tamil) tree on the west bank of the sacred tank within the precincts of the Temple of Lord Raṅganātha has come in for special mention in Śloka 49 of the first centum of 'Śrī Raṅgarāja Stavaṁ' of Śrī Parāśara Bhaṭṭar. It is said to have imbibed the fragrance of Tiruvāymoḻi. This goes to show that generations of devotees have sat under the shade of this ancient tree and reverently chanted Tiruvāymoḻi and delved into its inner meanings, discoursing on them. In this process, all the aroma emanating from those recitals and discourses attached itself to the tree, providing it first class nourishment too. It is very likely that the sweet-voiced birds (Koels), resting on the laurel tree, refer to these very devotees.

oruvaṇṇam ceṉṟu pukku, eṉakku oṉṟu urai-oṉ kiḷiyē!
ceru oṇ pūm poḻil cūḻ cekkar vēla't tiruvaṇvaṇṭūr
karu vaṇṇam, ceyya vāy, ceyya kaṇ, ceyya kai, ceyya kāl,
ceru oṇ cakkaram, caṅku aṭaiyāḷam tiruntak kaṇṭē. (VI–1–7)

Translation

Lovely parrot! whatever be the odds you should find your way
To Tiruvaṇvaṇṭūr of red soil with flower gardens lovely and say

Just one word on my behalf unto my Lord of dark hue,
Lips, eyes, hands and feet, all red, holding the discus bright
And the conch ins parable, spotting Him well from these [clues.

Note

The parrot signifies the Preceptors, true and steadfast, who faithfully pass on the learning gathered by them from their masters, without deviation or distortion. The parrot is known to repeat just what it hears. The parrot in question is advised by the Nāyakī to somehow reach the intended destination turning a blind eye to the enchanting scenery *en route*, lest it should succumb to the way-side attractions. Even at that end, the emissary shall, for her sake, submit to indignity, if any, heaped on it, such as caning etc., by way of denying it access to the Sovereign Lord. By rendering service to the Nāyakī, the emissary will be the first beneficiary the immediate recipient of the Lord's favours, much ahead of the Nāyakī herself, even as Hanumān, on his return from his pioneering visit to Laṅkā, got himself locked in Lord Rāma's sweet embrace (parṣvaṅgo Hanūmataḥ), a month ahead of Sītā's reunion with the Lord.

tiruntak kaṇṭu, eṉakku oṉṟu uraiyāy-oṉ ciṟu pūvāy!
cerunti, ñāḻal, makiḻ, puṉṉai, cūḻ taṇ tiruvaṇvaṇṭūr
perum taṇ tāmaraikkaṇ, peru nīḷ muṭi, nāl taṭantōḷ,
karun tiṇ mā mukil pōl tirumēṉi aṭikaḷaiyē. (VI–1–8)

Translation

You lovely little Pūvāi, go and see closely you should,
My cloud-hued Lord with lotus eyes, cool and broad,
Huge crown and hefty shoulders four, Who does reside
In cool Tiruvaṇvaṇṭūr, by lovely trees surrounded
And about Him come and tell me a nice word.

Note

Unless the emissary is a keen observer, he can't be an effective messenger. The Nāyakī wants the little lovely bird to have a close look at the Lord in Tiruvaṇvaṇṭūr in all details and

narrate to her what the little one saw. This is one way of the God-lover sustaining herself.

aṭikaḷ kaitoḻutu, alarmēl acaiyum aṉṉaṅkāḷ!
viṭivai caṅku olikkum tiruvaṉvaṇṭūr uṟaiyum
kaṭiya māyaṉ-taṉṉai, kaṇṇaṉai, neṭumālaik kaṇṭu,
koṭiya valviṉaiyēṉ-tiṟam kūṟumiṉ-vēṟukoṇṭē. (VI–1–9)

Translation

Ye, swans, gliding gently on flowers! report you should
About this fell sinner, in secret and with joined palms,
At the feet of Kaṇṇaṉ, my wondrous Lord of love supreme
Unto devotees, Who does in Tiruvaṇvaṇṭūr always reside
Where, at day-break, sweet strains from the conch could be heard.

Notes

In Secret:

When the Lord is alone with His consort, all the attendants having dispersed after discharging their respective duties.

At the feet:

Getting hold of the Lord's feet is the surest way of evoking response. 'anatikramaṇīyaṁ hi caraṇagrahaṇaṁ'.

vēṟukoṇṭu ummai yāṉ iranteṉ; veṟi vaṇṭiṉaṅkāḷ!
tēṟu nīrp pampai vaṭapālait tiruvaṇvaṇṭūr
māṟu il pōr arakkaṉ matiḷ nīṟu eḻac ceṟṟu, ukanta,
ēṟu cēvakaṉārkku eṉṉaiyum uḷaḷ eṉmiṉkaḷē. (VI–1–10)

Translation

You, sweet-smelling bees, with great respect do I entreat
That unto Him (Lord Rāma) of valour great, Who did the ramparts rout
Of the mighty demon and now has His abode
In Tiruvaṇvaṇṭūr, north of river Pampai, with its waters limpid,
You do resort and say, here languishes one of His wards.

Note

The Nāyakī has all along been commissioning different birds to convey her message to the Lord, but now she reverently approaches the bees, even as Śrī Rāma chose Hanumān for the special assignment of handing over His ring to Sītā. The Nāyakī requests the bees to tell Śrī Rāma that He should not rest on His oars with an air of complacence that He has already done everything for Sītā and through her, for her tribe, as a whole; actually, she (Nāyakī) is languishing here, at this end, although she is also one of His many wards.

miṉ koḷ cēr purinūl-kuṟaḷ āy, akal ñālam koṇṭa
vaṉ kaḷvaṉ aṭimēl kurukūrc caṭakōpaṉ coṉṉa
paṇ koḷ āyira'tuḷ ivai pattum tiruvaṇvaṇṭūrkku
iṉkoḷ pāṭal vallār mataṉar, miṉṉiṭai yavarkkē. (VI–1–11)

Translation

Those that chant these songs ten, highly delicious,
Which unto Tiruvaṇvaṇṭūr pertain, out of the mellifluous
Thousand, composed by Caṭakōpaṉ of Kurukūr, adoring the feet
Of the Lord, Who, as Vāmana, wearing on His person radiant,
The sacred thread charming, took (from Bali) on the sly, the worlds,
Will unto the Lord be dear like the lovers unto their beloveds.

Note

The chanters of this decad will be coveted by the Lord and His devotees, the Apsarās in Heaven.

Sixth Centum—Second Decad (VI-2)
(Miṉ iṭai maṭavārkaḷ)

Preamble

In this decad, the Āḻvār strikes an entirely new note, making a bold departure, rather, in refreshing contrast to the earlier ones. The Saint, who was hitherto pining for the Lord's presence and crying out his heart, now keeps Him at bay, when He eventually

turns up in post-haste (even as He rushed to Gajendra's aid) in response to the Nāyakī's piteous appeal in the last decad, conveyed to the Lord through her special emissaries. The Nāyakī resents the Lord's delayed appearance and arraigns Him for having strayed elsewhere, making love to the damsels of His special preference and He is being asked to go back to them. The door is shut against Him, a movement in the contrary direction indeed! But there is nothing uncommon about this, as this is a natural ingredient of convivial love, which is super-sensitive to, and extremely intolerant of the lapses on the part of either partner, the overzealous female, in particular, being critical of the remotest risk of alienation of the male from her, by his getting under the spell of any other lady-the characteristic feminine jealousy, keen and cruel. Actually, the Nāyakī's pangs of separation even egged her on to the extreme step of putting an end to her life, rather than eking out a miserable existence.

Of the nine kinds of relationship subsisting between the Lord (Super Soul) and the Individual Soul, as set out in the Śloka "Pitā ca rakṣakaḥ Śeṣī, Bharthā Jñeyo Ramāpatiḥ....." the husband-wife relationship is attracted here. The strained relationship such as the one exhibited in this decad, did subsist, as a temporary phase, between Lord Kṛṣṇa and the Gopīs. The Nāyakī would now seem to have got into the mood of the Gopīs. Similar treatment is noticeable in Kulaśekara Āḻvār's Perumāḷ Tirumoḻi (of Ērmalar Pūṅkuḻal) and Tirumaṅkai Āḻvār's Periya Tirumoḻi (Kāṭil Kaṭippiṭṭu).

miṉ iṭai maṭavārkaḷ-niṉ aruḷ cūṭuvār-muṉpu nāṉ atu añcuvaṉ;
maṉ uṭai ilaṅkai araṇ kāynta māyavaṉē!
uṉṉuṭaiya cuṇṭāyam nāṉ aṟivaṉ; iṉi atukoṇṭu ceyvatu eṉ?
eṉṉuṭaiya pantum kaḻalum tantu, pōku nampī! (VI–2–1)

Translation

I am afraid, You and I, the thin-waisted favourites of Yours
Will scold, all Your mischief do I know, yet it no longer matters.
The ramparts of Rāvaṇa's Laṅkā, You pulled down in anger
great,

You, perfect One of wondrous deeds, from here You better
depart
And go anywhere You like but leave my playthings here, all
right.

Notes

(i) Reference to playthings, in this song, would make it appear that Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī and the Lord were playing some game and the latter suddenly left. The Nāyakī felt piqued by this sudden departure of the game-partner so that, when He presented Himself later on, she would keep mum. And now, the Lord tried to coax her, in ever so many ways: He lavished epithets on her describing her as a thin-waisted beauty and so on. Even then, she would not respond and the frustrated Lover got hold of the games-materials lying on the ground (Ball etc.) and addressed them amorously. Well, the farthest limit of provocation had been reached and the Nāyakī could no longer resist coming out of her shell. She rebuked the Lord, saying that she was not the thin-waisted beauty referred to by Him and He would do well to go back to those beauties with whom He had been indulging prior to coming down to her. She also cautioned Him that, in case those ladies got to know of His having come over to her, they would scold both Him and her. But then, she was severing her connections with Him and the displeasure of those other ladies was, therefore, of no consequence to her. As the Lord was about to leave the place, picking in hand the games-materials, the Nāyakī sternly asked Him to leave her playthings and go. It may be recapitulated that, in the preamble to this decad, the Nāyakī was stated to be in a desperate mood, ready even to put an end to her life. What else is it but (spiritual) death when she spells out anything as hers, in His presence? That Savant Ciṟiyāttāṉ would point out that the notion of 'mine' and 'not mine' reigned supreme in Dhṛtarāṣtra's mind and this eventually led to the destruction of his race. Right

at the commencement of Bhagavad Gitā, he asked Sañjaya: Say, Sañjaya, say what wrought *my people* (māmakā) and the Pāṇḍavas ".

(ii) The Lord's destruction of Rāvaṇ's Laṅkā is also taken by the Nāyakī with a pinch of salt. She sees in it an attempt on His part to draw into His broad net, the members of the weaker sex, by making it appear that He did so much, ate no food, spent sleepless days and nights, bunded the ocean, fought a pitched battle with the formidable Rāvaṇa and destroyed his citadel, all for the sake of a woman. The Nāyakī spitefully declares that she could very well see through His game.

pōku nampī! uṉ tāmaraipurai kaṇ-iṇaiyum, cevvāy muṟuvalum,
ākulaṅkaḷ ceyya, aḷ taṟkē nōṟṟōmē yām;
tōkai mā mayilārkaḷ-niṉ aruḷ cūṭuvār-cevi ōcai vaittu eḻa
ākaḷ pōkaviṭṭu, kuḻal ūtu pōyiruntē. (VI–2–2)

Translation

Get thee gone, oh Sire; we womenfolk seem born to dwindle
Under the spell of Your lotus eyes and bewitching smiles
On Your red lips, better go and graze the cows,
Playing the flute from behind unto the recipients of Your love
Having locks lovely like the spread-out plumes of the peacock.

Note

When asked by the Nāyakī to get away, the Lord entered into an argument with her, saying that she could not claim ownership of the games materials and that apart, it would be most uncharitable on her part to expel Him who had come over to her, out of deep love. The Lover advanced towards the Nāyakī with bewitching smile and sweet glances but the Nāyakī, still smarting under a sense of deliberate neglect by the Lover, observed that His smiles and glances actually sapped her and other women, unfortunate like her, rather than sustain and bade Him to keep grazing the cows and playing the flute for the delectation of the lucky damsels of Gokula, the recipients of His favours, with lovely locks. The description of the lovely locks of the Lover's favourites

given here, initially came from His lips, complimenting the Nāyakī but she would not acknowledge it and she spitefully turned it on to those other ladies, basking in the sunshine of His love.

pōyiruntu, niṉ puḷḷuvam aṟiyātavarkku urai, nampī! niṉ ceyya
vāy iruṅ kaṉiyum, kaṇkaḷum viparītam in nāḷ;
vēy irum taṭam tōḷ-ṉār it tiruvaruḷ peṟuvār evarkoḷ-
mā irum kaṭalaik kaṭainta perumāṉālē? (VI–2–3)

Translation

Oh, Sire, better keep off from us and try Your viles
On girls unwary; indeed Your red fruit-like lips and eyes
Are more charming than ever before; I know not who are those,
With bamboo-like shoulders fine that shall be blest
To enjoy this great Churner of the ocean, deep and vast.

Note

The Lord who was asked to go and fend the cows and play the flute, as in the last song, affirmed that He could play the flute and give vent to His love all right, only in the company of His beloved ones, of which the Nāyakī was indeed the crown jewel. But the Nāyakī was adamant and retorted that she would not be led away by His guiles any more and that He would rather play His pranks on unwary customers elsewhere and get on with them. The Lord appealed to her once again, asking her to behold His eagerness to taste the bliss of kissing her lips and gazing at her charming figure. Lo! she found His lips and eyes even more charming than ever before. Overpowered that she was by the Lord's exquisite charm, she couldn't help giving expression to it, even in the midst of her feminine rancour. She thought within herself, who those blessed damsels would be, that shall have the most enviable rapport with the charming Lord, like unto the Divine Mother who got at Him through the churning of the Milky ocean.

āliṉ nīḷ ilai, ēḷ ulakum uṇṭu, aṉṟu nī kiṭantāy; uṉ māyaṅkaḷ
mēlai vāṉavarum aṟiyār; iṉi em paramē?
vēliṉ nēr taṭam kaṇṇiṉār viḷaiyāṭu cūḷalaic cūḷavē niṉṟu,
kāli mēykka vallāy! emmai nī kaḷaṟēlē. (VI–2–4)

Translation

Aren't You the One who once reposed on a fig-leaf tender,
Holding all the worlds in Your stomach? Your wondrous deeds,
How can we know when even the Celestials can't comprehend?
Oh, Lord, tending cows near about damsels with eyes like [spear
Don't tantalise us with white lies any more.

Note

The Lord refuted the Nāyakī's allegation of hollowness and insincerity and put it back on her and her mates, saying that He was absolutely forthright and straightforward and it was only they that were full of viles. The Nāyakī was, however, quick to point out the incompatibility of His reposing on a tender fig-leaf afloat, holding, as a tender babe, all the worlds inside His tummy and added that His mysterious deeds baffled even the exalted Celestials. The Lord then explained, rather apologetically, that He got detained by His Mother, who had asked Him to grace the cows, giving Him the stick and that the Nāyakī should not frown at Him to such an extent for this delay, beyond His control. The Nāyakī was, however, in no mood to swallow this fabrication and scorned that, in the name of grazing the cows, He would have been after girls of His special preference. The bubble having been pricked, the Lord kept on shilly-shallying. The Nāyakī cut Him short, saying that He need not tarry any longer and tantalise her with all lies and that He would rather ply His trade with those damsels with fine bamboo-like shoulders, with whom all His pretensions might pass muster.

kaḷarēl nampī! uṉ kaitavam maṇṇum viṇṇum naṉku aṟiyum; tiṇ cakkara
niḷaṟu tol paṭaiyāy! uṉakku oṉṟu uṇarttuvaṉ nāṉ;
maḷaṟu tēṉ moḷiyārkaḷ niṉ aruḷ cūṭuvār maṉam vāṭi niṟka, em
kuḷaṟu pūvaiyoṭum kiḷiyōṭum kuḷakēlē. (VI–2–5)

Translation

Oh, Sire, address not unto us such shallow words,
Your viles are well-known, in all the worlds,
You, wielder of the ancient discus, mighty and mobile!
Let me make You realise that desist You shall
From playing with the warbling Pūvai and parrots over here
Lest You should the minds of Your sweet-tongued favourites injure.

Note

The Lord suggests that they should seek arbitration to prove that He is the damned liar, they are dubbing Him to be. The Nāyakī, however, rules out the necessity for such a course for His stratagems are too well known, both on Earth and in Heaven. Did He not take advantage of the screen raised by the smoke from the incense burnt by the denizens in Heaven just after His sacramental bath and come down here as Kṛṣṇa and go back to the celestium, a hundred years after, by which time the smoke subsided? The Lord's holy attendants in Heaven were not aware of His departure during the interval. Again, all that He did as Śrī Kṛṣṇa is history indeed! And yet, the Lord insists that a wise and impartial witness should be called upon to sit in judgement. The Nāyakī rejoins that there is no dearth of witnesses and, for the matter of that, the discus in His hand is enough to knock the bottom of His case. Did He not once say that He would not take up arms in the battle of Mahābhārata and eventually go back on His plighted word? Cornered thus, the Lord kept silent, hanging His head down. Thereupon, the Nāyakī advised Him to listen to her, in case He was keen on finding a way out of this impasse. The Omniscient Lord was being advised and yet, He took it all in good parts and started praising the Nāyakī's speech as honey and so on. The Nāyakī took exception to this and she and her mates withdrew after making the sarcastic observation that the sweet-tongued damsels in His good books, were elsewhere. Even then, the Lord wouldn't leave the place and started caressing the Pūvai, the little warbler, and the parrots there. Seeing this from a distance, the Nāyakī warned that He would certainly prejudice those

other ladies, the lucky recipients of His grace, by going over here and, on the top of that, fondling the birds living at this end. The Nāyakī, therefore, advised Him to hasten to those ladies.

kuḻaki, eṅkaḷ kuḻamaṉaṉkoṇṭu, kōyiṉmai ceytu, kaṉmam oṉṟu
paḻaki yām iruppōm-paramē it tiru–aruḷkaḷ? [illai;
aḻakiyār, iv ulakam mūṉṟukkum tēvimai takuvār, palar uḷar;
kaḻakam ēṟēl, nampī! uṉakkum iḻaitē kaṉmamē. (VI–2–6)

Translation

Oh, Sire, 'tis no use Your riding rough-shod, fondling our dolls,
What You are, long association with you has shown us well,
Targets we aren't for Your amorous advances, others there are indeed,
Fit to be Your consorts, of beauty surpassing in all the worlds;
Force You shall not into our group, verily Your deeds
Will put even You to shame and make You hang Your head.

Note

Sensing the pulse of the Nāyakī, even the birds flew off and now, only the dolls remain on the scene. The Lord starts fondling the dolls but the Nāyakī prods Him, saying that all this behaviour will not help Him. The Lord, however, swears that He is hers, contemplating her all the time. This draws forth a sharp rebuff from the Nayaki that she has known enough of Him and His white lies, coming off in an unbroken succession, with perfect ease. This again gives a handle to the Lord who remarks that, being used to His pranks so well, they would sorely miss them all, if He went away. So saying, He stays on hob-nobbing, much to the chagrin of the Nāyakī who burst out that all His silly pranks were more than she could endure and that He would do well to turn His attention on those other favourites of His, of matchless beauty. She further warns Him not to force Himself any more into their group. But even this curt warning would not deter Him and He lingers on, knowing as He does, in His heart of hearts, that although the Nāyakī's

tongue utters such harsh words, inwardly she would want Him to stay on and bandy words like these, with her. And the Nāyakī frowns at Him, saying that He would fall low in His own estimation, if only He cared to examine the propriety of His conduct-literally, a re-enactment of the 'Kṛṣṇa-Gopīs episode'. Śrī Parāśara Bhaṭṭar would exclaim:

"Oh, what an amazing simplicity! the Lord of the Universe, the repository of all auspicious traits, the Supreme Controller of all, is feeling helpless before a handfull of shepherdesses, unable to move either way, neither go inside nor get out of the place. How strange it is that sages Vyāsa and Parāśara could not dwell on this astounding aspect of the Lord! Well, who else but these Āḻvār Saints, soaked in God-love, could comprehend and handle this theme which passeth all understanding of the common man who can't readily bring himself to believe that the Supreme Lord could ever condescend to reduce Himself to such a strange pass?

kaṉmam aṉṟu eṅkaḷ kaiyil pāvai paṟippatu; kaṭal-ñālam uṇṭitta
niṉmalā! neṭiyāy! uṉakkēlum, piḻai piḻaiyē;
vaṉmamē colli, emmai nī viḷaiyāṭuti; atu kēṭkil eṉ aimmār
taṉma-pāvam eṉṉār; oru nāṉṟu taṭi-piṉakkē. (VI–2–7)

Translation

Oh, immaculate Lord, you once gulped down the worlds sea-bound,
It hardly befits You, oh, great One, to squeeze from our hands
Our playthings; a mistake is a mistake even if by You committed,
Words you whisper, we dare not repeat and with us you flirt;
Surely, our brethren, when they get to know, will feel hurt,
For good or bad they wouldn't care and You they might hit.

Notes

(i) Finding the Gopīs terribly vexed with Him, Śrī Kṛṣṇa bade good-bye to them, wishing them well and told them that He would, however, be taking with Him, His playthings. But the Gopīs lost no time in picking up

those pieces, with a view to detaining Him and prolonging the controversy. This gave Śrī Kṛṣṇa the golden opportunity He was looking for, to come in physical contact with the Gopīs and snatch the materials from their hands. The Gopīs screamed that this was not the kind of job, expected of Him, to which He replied that this was too petty a job for Him Who had gulped down all the worlds. While conceding His great ability, the Gopīs pointed out that, however big He might be, mistakes committed by Him cannot be overlooked. Śrī Kṛṣṇa tried, in vain, to refute this by saying that He was immaculate and, therefore, above mistakes. At this stage, the Lord pretended to be non-plussed and whispered quite a few secrets into the ears of the Gopīs and they administered a stern warning that He would be belaboured by their brothers without any hesitation, if they got to know about His silly behaviour and the stupid things He spoke to them (Gopīs).

(ii) The secrets whispered into the ears of the Gopīs by the Lord, referred to in (i) above, should, in the particular context of Saint Nammāḻvār re-enacting the old scene of the days gone-by, be taken as *God's secrets with His Saints.* While Em ār was discoursing on this song, a few disciples asked him, " What are the secrets, Sire, which the Lord spoke to the Saint? " He replied: "When the Saint, illumined by God, has himself pronounced them as secret, how can you expect me to spell them out?"

piṇakki, yāvaiyum yāvarum piḷaiyāmal pētittum pētiyātatu ōr
kaṇakku il kīrtti veḷḷak katir ñāṇa mūrttiyiṇāy!
iṇakki, emmai em toḻimār viḷaiyāṭap pōtumiṉ eṉṉap pōntōmai
uṇakki, nī vaḷaittāl, eṉ collār ukavātavarē? (VI–2–8)

Translation

Oh, Sire. You are the embodiment of all that knowledge radiant,
You keep without name and form all things sentient and non-sentient
At the time of dissolution and at creation You do sort them out
And put the species back in their spheres, clear and cogent;

(We knew not You'd be here) our mates brought us for play,
If You hugged us close, what would the unfriendly say?

Note

When the Gopīs threatened to get Śrī Kṛṣṇa beaten, He took up the challenge and shouted at them. The Gopīs coolly told Him, they had known all about Him and there was no need for Him to make all that fuss. When called upon by Him to cite what exactly they had known about Him, they stated, as in the first four lines of this stanza. Śrī Kṛṣṇa then questioned them how, despite all that knowledge they dared to get Him belaboured and elicited the reply that one so great, should not meddle with those frail little girls who had come there to play, not knowing that He would also be there. There was a vast gulf of difference between His play and theirs. His was the creation, sustentation and dissolution of the Sportive Universe (Līlā Vibhūti) whereas they were engaged in simple games, with balls and dolls. Śrī Kṛṣṇa was asked to go His own way, leaving them alone, free to go on with their play. So saying, the Gopīs were about to withdraw themselves but Śrī Kṛṣṇa intercepted them and would not allow them to retreat. The Gopīs remonstrated that, if He encircled and hugged them, personally they had nothing to say, but it was likely to be criticised by the unfriendly spectators around, not aware of the intimate, indissoluble bond that subsists between the individual souls and the Super-Soul. It is here, the Gopīs gave out their real mind, hitherto concealed by their rough exterior.

ukavaiyāl neñcam uḷ uruki, uṉ tāmarait taṭam kaṇ viḻikaḷiṉ
aka valaip paṭuppāṉ aḻittāy uṉ tiruvaṭiyāl;
tākavu ceytilai; eṅkal ciṟṟilum, yām aṭu ciṟu cōṟum kaṇṭu, niṉ
muka oḷi tikaḻa muṟuval ceytu niṉṟilaiyē. (VI–2–9)

Translation

Smile You could and watch with Your face bright,
The castles we built in our play and the food we cooked,

But You kicked them all, You have indeed no heart,
Just to trap us into the sweet looks
From Your large, lotus eyes, with our hearts melting down.

Note

In spite of His intercepting the Gopīs, they went their own way, playing games like building houses and cooking food. Śrī Kṛṣṇa, literally pining for their sweet glances, albeit by way of quarrelling with Him, kicked all those things out. Knowing His mind quite well, the Gopīs looked at Him squarely and addressed Him, as above. The inner (esoteric) meaning of this is:

Those engaged in God-love quite often undergo the pangs of separation, when He does not oblige them with His sweet presence and the communion gets snapped. To avoid this painful contingency, these very people switch on to worldly affairs. But the Lord would not give them up and His lovely feet drag them back into His fold, kicking out their erstwhile aberration, the tendency to drift away from Him.

niṉṟu ilaṅku muṭiyiṉāy! irupattōr kāl aracu kaḷaikaṭṭa
veṉṟi nīḷ maḻuvā! viyaṉ ñālam muṉ paṭaittāy!
iṉṟu iv āyar kulattai vīṭu uyyat tōṉṟiya karumāṇikkac cuṭar!
niṉ-taṉṉāl nalivē paṭuvōm eṉṟum, āycciyōmē. (VI–2–10)

Translation

Oh, Sire of sapphire hue. You sport the crown grand
With Your axe triumphant You did root out the kings
For generations, the vast Universe You created once,
And now You are here to redeem this shepherd clan,
But we shepherdesses are by You tormented for ever.

Note

The rancour of the overzealous Gopīs would obviously not last long, as it is but a temporary phase, an interim facet of connubial relationship, culminating in the reunion of the lover and the beloveds. Śrī Kṛṣṇa didn't merely kick the houses etc, put up by the Gopīs during play, but kicked their rancour out and made them gaze at His exquisite Form, from the lotus feet upwards, right up to His crown. It is only the Victor that wears the crown and by mentioning the grandeur of His crown, the Gopis mean to acknowledge Him as the Victor, in their erstwhile squabble. Even as He created the worlds, with all their contents, from the melting pot to which they had been consigned earlier, He has infused fresh life into the Gopis who had earlier been the victims of devastating feminine jealousy. For Him, who as Paraśurāma, destroyed the haughty Kṣatriya kings, extending over twentyone generations, is it at all much of a job to get the better of the frail Gopīs? Of course, the Gopīs know, that rejoining their Lord now doesn't mean perpetual enjoyment of His company and they are in for further spells of misery, due to separation from Him. Even so, they are prepared to brave it and get back to Him at least for the time-being.

āycci ākiya aṉṉaiyāl aṉṟu veṇṇey vārttaiyuḷ ciṟṟa muṉṭu aḻu
kūtta appaṉ-taṉṉai, kurukūrc caṭakōpaṉ
ēttiya tamiḻ-mālai āyirattuḷ ivaiyum ōr pattu icai yoṭum
nāttaṉṉāl navila uraippārkku illai nalkuravē. (VI–2–11)

Translation

Those that chant tunefully these songs ten
Out of the thousand Tamil songs of Caṭakōpaṉ
Of Kurukūr, adoring the Lord, Who (as child Kṛṣṇa) cried bitter
When someone complained, in general, about the theft of butter,
Unto His mother, will never from poverty (of God-love) suffer.

Notes

(i) Here is a splendid reference to one of the many infant sports of the Lord. The shepherdesses of Bṛndāvaṉ complained to Yaśodha that all their butter had been stolen by some one. Just on hearing this general complaint without any mention about Him in particular, child Kṛṣṇa cried immediately, as if to plead that He was not the culprit. Thus, by His own unbidden cry, He betrayed Himself as the urchin thief. An interesting

parallel for this is cited in Īṭu commentary. One day, the residents of a mutt (Monastery) asked among themselves as to who should clean and water the monastery and it was decided that the unlearned (uninitiated in the Vedas) among them should be detailed for such menial service. One among them immediately cried (although nobody had spotted him out, as the unlearned): "Sirs, how can I clean such a big place as this?" Poor fellow, he betrayed himself by this spontaneous cry, unnamed and unsought.

(ii) The Lord's grief, at His repulsion by the Gopīs, shutting the door against Him, was just as poignant as when He was tied to the pounder by His mother, as a punishment for stealing butter.

Sixth Centum—Third Decad (VI-3)
(Nalkuravum, Celvum)

Preamble

In VI-1, the Saint sent messages to Lord Rāma at Tiruvaṇvaṇṭūr but He responded, rather late. This made the Nāyakī furious and she enacted, in the preceding decad, all that tussle, which ensued between Śrī Kṛṣṇa and the Gopīs. Ultimately, the Lord proved victorious, as seen in VI-2-10, and the reunion between Him and the Saint materialised. The Saint now keeps musing over the superior might of the Lord, in having weaned him round, despite his stout resolve not to have anything to do with that malingering defaulter any more. The Lord reveals to the Āḻvār His extraordinary capacity for achieving the impossible besides the glorious Iconic Form in which He stays in Tiruviṇṇakar (In Tamilnadu, near Tirukkuṭantai, covered by V-8). The Āḻvār recounts this experience, in the current decad.

nalkuravum, celvum, narakum, cuvarkkamum āy,
velpakaiyum, naṭpum, viṭamum, amutamum āy,
palvakaiyum paranta perumāṉ, eṉṉai āḷvāṉai,
celvam malku kuṭit tiruviṇṇakark kaṇṭēṉē. (VI-3-1)

Translation

Seen have I in Tiruviṇṇakar, with riches filled,
My Liege-Lord, Who does encompass in His universe vast,
Pelf and penury, hell and Svarga, love and hatred,
Poison and nectar and many such opposites.

Notes

(i) The Āḻvār says that he has seen in Tiruviṇṇakar, the the Lord who composes within Himself all the incompatibles. It is He who kept kucela poor initially, then made him rich and again pushed him into penury. It is He that puts some people in the luxurious and delightful Svarga and consigns some others to the dismal hell; He engenders in us hatred as well as love for Him, the one who hates Him is made to love Him and vice versa. For example, the inveterate Kaṇṭākarṇa became friendly to the Lord whereas Śimālika who was an intimate friend of His, got his head severed by the Lord's discus. It is the Lord who gave Śiva poison and nectar to the Devās; He is like poison unto some and like nectar unto others. Actually, those that look upon everything as forming part of the Lord's immense possessions, vast and varied, will acquire perfect mental equanimity, making no distinction between these opposite pairs, neither elated by the one nor depressed by the other.

(ii) The Lord, enshrined in this pilgrim centre (Tiruviṇṇakar), is called by the Āḻvār as 'Oppili Appaṉ', the peerless Sire, vide the ninth-song, while the Purāṇik tradition carries the Lord's name as "*Uppili Appaṉ*", *salt-free* dishes being offered to Him during the diurnal worship.

kaṇṭa iṉpam tuṉpam, kalakkaṅkaḷum tēṟṟamum āy,
taṇṭamum taṇmaiyum, taḷalum niḻalum āy,
kaṇṭukōṭaṟku ariya perumāṉ, eṉṉai āḷvāṉ ūr
teṉ tiraip puṉal cūḻ tiruviṇṇakar nal nakarē. (VI-3-2)

Translation

Tiruviṇṇakar, the lovely city the limpid waters surround
Is where my Lord stays, whose possessions vast none can comprehend;
He is at once pleasure and pain, one sees around,
Clarity and confusion, fury and favour, blistering heat and cool shade.

Note

This is just a follow-up of the theme mooted in the preceding song, the blending in Him of the opposites. Sensual pleasures, hankered after by many, are studiously eschewed by those blessed by Him, as a serious impediment in the way of attaining Him. Again, there are the book-worms, who despite their immense reading do not have clear ideas, suffering as they do from lack of proper assimilation and the Lord's grace which helps such assimilation. The unlettered score easily over the so-called scholars and, by the grace of their Preceptors, enjoy absolute clarity of thought and understanding. This has already been illustrated in the notes under I-9-6. In respect of the impious and ungodly (Asuras), the Lord is fast and furious and is in no mood to forgive them, while, at the same time, He swears by His devotees, that they are above mistakes and even if they commit mistakes, according to others, He takes them all in good light, saying that they have done well. The climate, with its components of heat and cold, is also controlled by the Lord. Look at the Saints who see heat in cold when the Lord does not commune with them and cold in heat when in His company. In fact, there is nothing in the Lord's Universe, which is not worthy of love, so far as Saints are concerned, in view of their universal outlook, making them see God everywhere. Two devotees, by name, Cēṉāpati tācar and Nallār travelled together to the Holy hill of Tirupati. On the way, Tācar beat the bushes with a stick to clear the way. This brought forth a sharp rebuke from Nallār who asked: "Comrade, why do you punish God's bush which has not stood in the way of your desires (wealth and lust)?"

nakaramum nāṭukaḷum, ñāṉamum mūṭamum āy,
nikar il cūḻ cuṭar āy, iruḷ āy, nilaṉ āy, vicumpu āy,
cikara māṭaṅkaḷ cūḻ tiruviṇṇakar cērnta pirāṉ
pukar koḷ kīrtti allāl, illai-yāvarkkum puṇṇiyamē. (VI–3–3)

Translation

For one and all, salvation lies only in the glowing grace
Of the Lord in Tiruviṇṇakar, with its towering mansions,
Who is at once hall and hamlet, intelligence and ignorance.
The sky and Earth, pitched darkness and peerless brilliance.

Note

There are some, enjoying the luxuries of life in big cities with extra amenities while there are others, toiling hard and eking out a miserable existence in the villages with no amenities whatsoever. Well, these are all controlled and regulated by the Lord. The correct perception of things, with due intelligence as well as misconception resulting from ignorance, light and darkness, the concrete Earth and the nebulous Sky, all these are directed by the Lord who resides in Tiruviṇṇakar, in His 'Arca' (iconic) Form, wherein converge all His excellences in a perfect measure. It is here, in this land of darkness and nescience, that His auspicious qualities shine all the more, unlike the Heaven where it is just like a lamp burning in broad day-light.

puṇṇiyam pāvam, puṇarcci pirivu eṉṟu ivai āy,
eṇṇam āy, maṟappu āy, uṇmai āy, iṉmai āy, allaṉ āy,
tiṇṇa māṭaṅkaḷ cūḻ tiruviṇṇakar cērnta pirāṉ,
kaṇṇaṉ iṉ aruḷē kaṇṭukoḷmiṉkaḷ-kaitavamē? (VI–3–4)

Translation

Know, Ye, 'tis all the sweet, spontaneous grace of Kaṇṇaṉ, enshrined
In Tiruviṇṇakar, with its solid mansions, Who in Him combines
Merit and demerit, solidarity and segregation,

Remembrance and forgetfulness, truth and falsehood and yet remains
To all these unattached; should this solid truth are one-question?

Notes

(i) 'Puṇya', giving rise to happiness and 'Pāpa' leading to misery, the corresponding pleasure of enjoying the coveted things and pain of privation from them, are directed and regulated by the Supreme Lord.

(ii) Again, remembrance and forgetfulness, the truth revealing His existence and the falsehood denying it, are also controlled by him, as the Internal Controller of one and all and yet, He remains unattached to either of these opposites. This is the supreme truth and its veracity hardly needs questioning.

kaitavam cemmai, karumai veḷumaiyum āy,
mey poy, iḷamai mutumai, putumai paḻamaiyum āy,
ceyta tiṉ matiḷ cūḻ tiruviṇṇakar cērnta pirāṉ
peyta kāvu kaṇṭīr-perum tēvu uṭai mūvulakē. (VI–3–5)

Translation

The triple worlds where reside the exalted Devas (Brahmā and others)
Are but the orchards raised by the benevolent Lord in Tiruviṇṇakar,
With its ramparts, robust and lovely, who directs
Truth and falsehood, the sneaky and the erect,
The young and the old, old and new, black and white.

Notes

(i) From Brahmā down to the smallest insect, all are His wards, without distinction of high and low. Some are forthright and straightforward while there are others who are nothing but crooked and who can never be erect in word, deed or thought. Well, all these are controlled by the Supreme Lord who also combines in Himself these contrary traits. For instance, as Kṛṣṇa,

the cowherd boy, He would search for His missing calf inside the butter pots while, as Śrī Rāma, He wouldn't mind speaking out the bare truth even to a demoness like Sūrpanakhā who met Him at Pañcavaṭi and enquired about Him.

(ii) *Black and white*: The Lord incarnated as Balarāma, of white Complexion and as Kṛṣṇa, of black complexion. When they moved, side by side, it looked as if a black mountain followed a white mountain.

(iii) *Truth and falsehood*: As Śrī Rāma, the Lord was the great apostle of truth while, as Śrī Kṛṣṇa, He was a bundle of apparent contradictions, truthful unto the devout and the opposite of it to the otherwise.

(iv) *The young and the old*: The ageless Lord incarnated as a Babe, still retaining His stature as the Primate, the oldest of all (Purāṇa Puruṣa).

(v) *Old and New*: Ageless and hence old He, no doubt, is but, all the same, He retains the youthful freshness, exhilarating beyond measure.

mūvulakaṅkaḷum āy, allaṉ āy, ukappu āy, muṉivu āy,
pūvil vāḻ makaḷ āy, tavvai āy, pukaḻ āy, paḻi āy,
tēvar mēvit toḻum tiruviṇṇakar cērnta pirāṉ
pāviyēṉ maṉattē uṟaikiṉṟa parañcuṭarē. (VI–3–6)

Translation

The resplendent Lord Supreme Who, in this sinner's mind resides
And in Him combines the eternal Heaven and the ephemeral worlds,
Likes and dislikes, the Goddess of affluence and her number opposite;
Fame and opprobrium, stays in Tiruviṇṇakar, the Celestials' resort favourite.

Notes

(i) The three worlds, with their strange admixture of Satva, Rajas and Tamas, with their inhabitants, bound down

by their actions, past and present, liable to dissolution, as well as the Eternal Land (Heaven) in contra-distinction to the Sportive Universe, referred to above, are controlled by the Supreme Lord.

(ii) A thing, liked by some, is disliked by some others; the same person might like a thing at one time and dislike it at another. Some are affluent, being the recipients of Lakṣmī's grace, while others are oppressed by chill penury, due to the lack of such grace. Some are praise worthy while there are others who are condemned as despicable. All these are controlled by the Lord; while He is extolled by the devout, He is condemned by the demoniac.

(iii) The Saint calls himself a sinner, recollecting how, in the earlier decad, he had the cheek, the impudence to shut the door against the Lord, when He presented Himself.

paraṃ cuṭar uṭampu āy, aḻukkup patitta uṭampu āy,
karantum tōṉṟiyum, niṉṟum, kaitavaṅkaḷ ceytum, viṇṇōr
ciraṅkaḷāl vaṇaṅkum tiruviṇṇakar cērnta pirāṉ
varam koḷ pātam allāl, illai-yāvarkkum vaṉ caraṇē. (VI–3–7)

Translation

Refuge, safe and sound, for each and every one,
There's naught but the glorious feet of the puzzling Lord,
Who's both the mundane and the ultra-mundane, hidden and open,
And stays in Tiruviṇṇakar where Devas come and bow their heads.

Notes

The entire Universe is the Lord's body. He also possesses His own unique form (Divya maṅgala vigraha), the aprākṛta (ultra-mundane) and *Śuddha Satva* (impeccable purity).

He sustains all things and beings, hidden inside them as their Internal Controller; He also comes out in the open as Śrī Rāma and Kṛṣṇa. He is transparent to the devotees and hidden to the rest. His feet confer all boons and will

not give up the devotees even if the Lord and His Divine Consort Who is grace personified, do give up (a contingency which will, in the very nature of things, never occur). Hence, the Lord's feet constitute the life refuge for one and all, from the exalted Brahmā down to the meanest creature.

vaṉ caraṇ curarkku āy, acurarkku vem kūṟṟamum āy,
taṉ caraṇ niḻaṟkīḻ ulakam vaittum, vaiyātum,
teṉ caraṇ ticaikkut tiruviṇṇakar cērnta pirāṉ
eṉ caraṇ eṉ kaṇṇaṉ, eṉṉai āḷuṭai eṉ appaṉē. (VI–3–8)

Translation

In Tiruviṇṇakar, the Refuge of the southerly direction, stays
Kaṇṇaṉ, my Liege-Lord, my sole Refuge, the Devas haven safe,
The deadly opponent of the Asuras, Who caresses under His feet
And shelters the devout and leaves others in scorching heat.

Notes

(i) The Lord is known to be absolutely impartial and yet, whenever the Devas are tormented by the Asuras, the former seek refuge in Him and He engages Himself in a pitched battle against the Asuras and vanquishes them. There is, however, no inconsistency, if looked at in the manner indicated below.

(ii) In the tanks dug by charitable men, one man allays his thirst, while another drowns himself of death. The lamp is there to shed light during nights and make our movements easy. But then, the winged ants rush in and die. The Lord, by Himself, is not overzealous in protecting the Devas or hell-bent to put down the Asuras but none can help the latter category if they court destruction, as in the instances cited here.

(iii) Unto those, who seek Him as the Sole Refuge, He grants cool shelter and makes them forgot all their erstwhile miseries. On the other hand, those who stray away from Him and run after the sensual pleasures, like unto trying to quench one's thirst by swallowing

the blazing flame or reposing under the shade cast by the swinging hood of the Cobra, are left severely alone, to wither away.

eṉ appaṉ eṉakku āy, ikuḷ āy, eṉṉaip peṟṟavaḷ āy,
poṉ appaṉ, maṇi appaṉ, muttu appaṉ, eṉ appaṉum āy,
miṉṉap poṉ matiḷ cūḻ tiruviṇṇakar cērnta appaṉ,
taṉ oppār il appaṉ, tantaṉaṉ-taṉa tāḷ niḻalē. (VI–3–9)

Translation

The peerless Lord Who unto me is Father, Mate and Mother,
All combined, my Sire, like gold, ruby and pearl put together,
Stays in Tiruviṇṇakar with its golden ramparts all around,
Me, He has under the cool shade of His feet grounded.

Notes

(i) The great Sages have proclaimed: " Vāsudeva tharucchāyā nāthi śīthā na gharmadhā....," that is, the shade of Vāsudeva, the gigantic tree, is most soothing and refreshing, it prevents entry into hell and is, therefore, worth getting into. Such a shade has been granted to Saint Nammāḻvār by the Lord of His own accord in His spontaneous Grace. This great benefaction of the Lord is being extolled by the Saint in this song. By the shade of the Lord is actually meant service unto Him in His immediate presence.

(ii) In the world around, the Father is distinct from the Mother and the Mother is distinct from the Mate. The combination of all these different functionaries in one and the same person, is not possible except in God Who is unique in all respects. So also, Gold serves a certain purpose, the ruby serves yet another purpose and the pearl, a third, but one can secure all these benefits from the Lord alone, who is 'All in one'.

niḻal veyyil, ciṟumai perumai, kuṟumai neṭumaiyum āy,
cuḻalvaṉa niṟpaṉa, maṟṟum āy, avai allaṉum āy,
maḻalai vāy vaṇṭu vāḻ tiruviṇṇakar maṉṉu pirāṉ
kaḻalkaḷ aṉṟi, maṟṟōr kaḷaikaṇ ilam; kāṇmiṉkaḷē. (VI–3–10)

Translation

Take it on oath, Saviour we have none but the feet
Of the Lord, who resides in Tiruviṇṇakar where go gay
The lisping bees, Who is at once, short and tall, shade and heat,
Things still and mobile and all else but to them attached, in no way.

Notes

In every centum of this great work, there is a decad which is addressed by the Saint to the world at large, wherein he preaches the Supremacy of God, His amazing simplicity etc. So then, this is the crucial decad in this centum, conveying the golden message to the people that the feet of the Lord, enshrined in Tiruviṇṇakar constitute our sole Refuge.

The Lord is said to combine in Him all these contraries, the cool shade and the scorching heat, the smallest and the biggest, still, mobile and what not, as the entire universe, the created worlds with their vast varieties, constitutes His body and yet, He will not partake of these qualities.

kāṇmiṉkaḷ, ulakIr! eṉṟu kaṇmukappē nimirnta
tāḷ-iṇaiyaṉ-taṉṉaik kurukūrc caṭakōpaṉ coṉṉa
āṇai āyirattut tiruviṇṇakarp pattum vallār
kōṇai iṉṟi, viṇṇōrkku eṉṟum āvar kuravarkaḷē. (VI-3–11)

Translation

Those that are well-versed in these songs ten, out of the thousand,
Composed by Caṭakōpaṉ of Kurukūr, at the Lord's command,
Pointing to the worldlings, right in front, the Lord's towering feet,
Will for unreserved admiration by the Celestials become fit.

Notes

(i) The Dramiḍa (Tamil) Vedas, like the Sanskrit Vedas convey the Lord's command-' Śrutis Smṛtir mamaivājñā.'

(ii) Those that are well-versed in these ten songs will compel the unreserved admiration of the 'Nitya Sūris' (the Ever-free Angels) in Heaven and command their respect, that even these people, dwelling in the dark land of nescience, are enjoying the Lord so well.

Sixth Centum—Fourth Decad (VI-4)
(Kuravai āycciyarōṭu)

Preamble

In the last decad of the last centum, the Āḻvār wished to sustain himself by contemplating the Lord's wondrous deeds during His Avatāras but literally broke down, overwhelmed by emotion. It was with deep sorrow, born of frustration, he then gave vent to his inability to steady himself and recount the Lord's deeds, mighty and miraculous. But the picture which has now emerged, is vastly different, the erstwhile emotional break-down and exhaustion yielding place to exhilaration. In every song, the first two lines, (as in the original text), recount the Lord's glorious deeds and activities while the next two lines bespeak the Āḻvār's extraordinary joy, resulting from such recital *cum* contemplation. In dire contrast to the appalling sense of worthlessness, betrayed by him quite often in the earlier songs, the Āḻvār now concludes each song by showering on himself praises like, 'there is none equal to me in all the land", "there is none above me" etc. These do not, however, smack of bravado or hauteur, being the expressions of an ecstatic mind dissolved in God-love, by-no-means comparable to the utterances of those who are in their normal senses, dominated by egoistic compulsions.

In this decad, the Āḻvār confines himself exclusively to Kṛṣṇāvatāra. Stray references, here and there, to other Avatāras, such as the Lord spanning all the worlds as Trivikrama, have also an ultimate bearing on Kṛṣṇāvatāra only. c.f. Periyāḻvār Tirumoḻi

where Queen Yaśodhā beckons Baby Kṛṣṇa as "Come, Come, oh, Vāmana Nampī! Come, my darling!"

Kuravai āycciyarōṭu kōttatum, kuṉṟam oṉṟu ēntiyatum,
uravu nīrp poykai nākam kāyntatum uṭpaṭa, maṟṟum pala
aravil-paḷḷip pirāṉ-taṉ māya viṉaikaḷaiyē alaṟṟi,
iravum naṉ pakalum tavirkilan-eṉṉa kuṟai eṉakkē? (VI-4-1)

Translation

Could there be any want for us, who dote, night and day,
On the many exploits, mighty and marvellous, of the great Benefactor,
Our Lord, resting on serpent-bed, His dancing with Gopis, going gay,
Lifting up Mount Govardhana and trouncing the serpent in deep waters?

Note

The Lord, who was reposing on His serpent-bed in the Milky-ocean, gave up His bed and came down to Mathurā (Uttar Pradesh). Recountingt he many deeds of Lord Kṛṣṇa, Who thus came down from the Milk-ocean to Mathurā, the Āḻvār begins with the famous 'Rāsa Krīḍā' where Kṛṣṇa assumes many forms and holds the hand of each of the half a million Gopis, moving in a circle. It is but appropriate that the Āḻvār begins with this event, as he feels that his reunion with the Lord, after all that squabble in VI-2, is like the 'Rāsa Krīḍā'. On His part, the Lord, feels that His union with the Āḻvār gives Him the same amount of pleasure as He had, when in the company of that vast multitude of Gopis during that classic dance. And then, the said dance revealed the amazing simplicity of the Lord. Such simplicity can, however, be appreciated in its true light only when it emanates from one who enjoys paramountcy (paratva) as well. Therefore it is, that the Āḻvār recounts the lifting of Mount Govardhana, betokening Śrī Kṛṣṇa's supremacy, immediately after 'Rāsa Krīḍā'.

kēyat tim kuḻal ūtiṟṟum, nirai mēyttatum, keṇṭai oṉ kaṇ,
vācap pūṅ kuḻal piṉṉai tōḷkaḷ maṇantatum, maṟṟum pala
māyak kōlap pirāṉ-taṉ ceykai niṉaintu, maṉam kuḻaintu,
nēyattōṭu kaḻinta pōtu -eṉakku ev ulakam nikarē? (VI–4–2)

Translation

Equal unto me, is there a world, as I go into raptures
Over the wondrous Lord, playing the flute sweet, leading cows to pasture,
Getting locked in sweet embrace of fish-eyed Piṉṉai, whose locks
Are with fragrant flowers bedecked and myriads of such miracles?

Notes

(i) A whole decad has been devoted by Periyāḻvār to a thrilling description of the enthralling strains from Lord Kṛṣṇā's flute. Śri Parāśara Bhaṭṭar has epitomised all that, in just one Śloka of the second centum of his 'Śrī Raṅgarāja Stavaṁ', where the author goes to the extent of saying that Śri Kṛṣṇa felt entranced by His own music.

(ii) Oh, what a wonder of wonders! The Lord in Heaven, unfolding an unending stream of bliss unto the 'Nityās' and Muktās', comes down to Earth, taking birth in the shepherd community, known for its low intelligence, and becomes one of them, tending the cows and calves with great delight, excelling even His desire to stay in Heaven. It is said that, even after His return to the Celestium, He fondly recollected this particular activity of His, during His Avatāra as Kṛṣṇa, and sometimes even uttered the sounds, "ḍriyō! ḍriyō!", fancying that He was following the flock of cows and calves, tending them. Musing over Lord Kṛṣṇa's wondrous deeds on Earth, the Saint feels that this unique enjoyment of his cannot be had even in the high Heaven where the Lord's transcendent glory is far more pronounced, throwing into shade His other aspect of 'Saulabhya' (easy accessibility).

nikar il mallaraic ceṟṟatum, nirai mēyttatum, nīḷ neṭum kaic
cikara mā kaḷiṟu aṭṭatum, ivai pōlvaṉavum, piṟavum
pukar koḷ cōtip pirāṉ-taṉ ceykai niṉaintu, pulampi, eṉṟum
nukara, vaikal vaikappeṟṟēṉ-eṉakku eṉ iṉi nōvatuvē?
(VI–4–3)

Translation

Could there be any affliction for me, who time does eke
With mind and tongue steeped in the deeds miraculous
Of (Kṛṣṇa), the radiant Lord, His killing the wrestlers peerless,
Tending the cows and slaying the elephant, tall and huge, with long trunk?

Notes

(i) Śrī Kṛṣṇa had to encounter hostile wrestlers on two different occasions. The first was when Akrūra escorted Him and Balarāmа to Kaṁsa's court, all the way from Vrindāvan. Right at the entrance to the palace was stationed a frenzied elephant of formidable size, in must, so as to pull down the Divine Brothers and trample them to death. But Kṛṣṇa pulled out the tusk and slew the animal with it, effortlessly. After overcoming this initial hurdle, they advanced towards the palace, only to be confronted, very soon, by two heavy-weight wrestlers, Cāṇūra and Muṣṭika, of enormous proportions. These were also vanquished, in no time, by Kṛṣṇa, the divine lad.

The next occasion, when Śrī Kṛṣṇa had to face wrestlers, was in Duryodhana's palace. The Lord went to Duryodhana's court, as a messenger from the Pāṇḍavas but the evil-minded Duryodhana had put up a nicely decorated throne for Śrī Kṛṣṇa, on a fake dais, with a false floor. As soon as Kṛṣṇa took His seat, the flimsy floor gave way and He went deep into the hollow beneath, where remained hidden a band of wrestlers, ready to pounce upon Him. Assuming a gigantic form (Viśva Rūpa), He quelled them all, with perfect ease.

(ii) The radiance of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, referred to, in this song, is the one, contemporaneously enjoyed and given

expression to, by the fortunate damsels in Mathurā city, who beheld the special glow on the Lord's face after He vanquished the huge elephant and the mighty wrestlers.

nōva, āycci uralōṭu ārkka iraṅkiṟṟum, vañcap peṇṇaic
cāvap pāl uṇṭatum, ūr cakaṭam iṟac cāṭiyatum,
tēvak kōlap pirāṉ-taṉ ceykai niṉaintu, maṉam kuḷaintu,
mēvak kālaṅkaḷ kūṭiṉēṉ-eṉakku eṉ iṉi vēṇṭuvatē? (VI-4-4)

Translation

Contemplate do I, with all my heart, all the time,
The wondrous deeds of the Lord of ultra-mundane Form,
The pain on His person, when tied to a pounder by His mother,
His sucking to death the breast of (Pūtanā), the Imposter,
His kicking to pieces the demon in the cart-wheel and many others;
Is there indeed a thing I need, any further?

Note

Nañcīyar used to observe, with great feeling, while chanting this song: "Look at the telling manner in which this song has been worded by the Saint. The pain on the person of child Kṛṣṇa, when He was tied to the pounder by Yaśodhā, is now felt by the Āḷvār as if it were inflicted on him. Oh, what an engrossment!"

vēṇṭit tēvar irakka vantu piṟantatum, vīṅku iruḷvāy,
pūṇṭu aṉṟu aṉṉai pulampa, pōy aṅku ōr āykkulam pukkatum,
kāṇṭal iṉṟi vaḷarntu, kañcaṉait tuñca vañcam ceytatum,
īṇṭu nāṉ alaṟṟappeṟṟēṉ-eṉakku eṉṉa ikal uḷatē? (VI-4-5)

Translation

Full—throated do I recount, right here, the deeds golden,
Of my Lord Who incarnated (as Kṛṣṇa) at Devas' request,
And to set at naught the mother's fears did retreat,
Under cover of night, into the shepherd clan and hidden

From enemies grew, outwitted Kañcaṉ and him did slay;
Is there for me any want that needs to be allayed?

Notes

(i) The Lord's incarnation is ostensibly at the request of the Devas but intrinsically to fulfil His own urge to mingle freely with the devout, over here, and feed them with His exquisite charm and exhilarating traits—the 'Sādhu paritrāṇām' (Sustenance of the devout), in its true sense.

(ii) King Kamsa, simulating affection for Balarāma and Kṛṣṇa, his nephews, invited them to attend the festival of archery so that they could be vanquished by the one or the other agency, set up by him for the purpose and then openly bemoan their loss, to avoid public suspicion. But, alas! he was outwitted by the Omniscient Kṛṣṇa, who was well aware of Kamsa's nefarious designs on Him, and put an end to him and his evil intentions.

(iii) Having lost all the earlier babes, right at emergence from her womb, Devaki caught hold of the Divine Babe's feet and begged of Him, both, out of maternal love and fear of the tyrant of a brother (Kamsa), to retreat elsewhere and remain safe.

ikal koḷ puḷḷaip piḷantatum, imil ēṟukaḷ ceṟṟatuvum,
uyar koḷ cōlaik kuruntu ocittatum uṭpaṭa, maṟṟum pala
akal koḷ vaiyam aḷanta māyaṉ, eṉ appaṉ-taṉ māyaṅkaḷē
pakal irāp paravap peṟṟēṉ-eṉakku eṉṉa maṉap parippē?
(VI-4-6)

Translation

Blest am I to laud, day and night, the wondrous deeds
Of my mysterious Lord Who spanned all the worlds,
Tore into twain the beak of the demoniac bird, controlled
The unruly bulls and slew, 'tween the twin trees rolled

And pulled them down, these and many more wonders;
Could there for me be mental affliction any longer?

Note

A demon, set upon child Kṛṣṇa by Kamsa, stood on the bank of the river Yamuna, in the form of a gigantic stork and swallowed the Divine Child Who, however, blistered the stomach of the bird. Unable to bear the torture inside, the devil spat the child out and was about to peck at Him with its beak, when the latter took time by the forelock and split the bird's beak into two and killed it. In his 'Yādavābhyudhayam', Śri Vedānta Deśika says that the bird was of formidable proportions, looking like a winged Kailās mountin, creeping slowly and that, after it was slain, its plumes were tied up, here and there, by the shepherd boys, as a warning signal for evil-doers, with sinister designs on the Divine child.

maṉap parippōṭu aḻukku māṉiṭa cātiyil tāṉ piṟantu,
taṉakku vēṇṭu urukkoṇṭu, tāṉ taṉa cīṟṟattiṉai muṭikkum
puṉat tuḻāy muṭi mālai mārpaṉ, eṉ appaṉ-taṉ māyaṅkaḷē
niṉaikkum neñcu uṭaiyēṉ-eṉakku iṉi yār nikar nīḷ nilattē?
(VI–4–7)

Translation

Is there any one, a match unto me, in this huge world,
Possessing as I do, a mind wholly absorbed in the wondrous deeds
Of my Sire, wearing tuḷaci garland fresh, on His crown
And winsome chest, the radiant Lord assuming Forms of His own
And coming into the midst of the dirty humans,
Just to give vent to His fury and quell ungodly demons?

Notes

(i) The last line conveys the cream of this song. The benevolent Lord gets terribly furious when His devotees are offended against; if He came down and took birth among the humans, with all their dirt and squalor and engaged Himself in a duel with Hiraṇya and Rāvaṇa,

it was because of the terrible affront they had thrown at His devotees. The Lord's anger would not get appeased until He tormented and tortured the offenders, even though He could quell them all, by a mere resolve, without moving His little finger. This is how the illustrious Nañciyar would interpret the Lord's advent and obviously, he derived his authority from the text of this song. Nampiḷḷai puts it that the mother's anger over those, who tease and torment her child, can subside only when she pours forth her ire on them. In this simile the mother takes the place of the Lord and the child, that of His devotee.

(i) The Tuḷaci garland, cool and fresh, will be worn by the Lord only when His anger subsides after the extermination of the enemies of His devotees.

(iii) For His Avatāras, the Lord assumes the form of His choice, eminently suited for the purpose—" Icchā grahito abhimatoru dehaḥ ", as the Sages put it and " Sambhavāmi ātmamāyayā ", as the Lord Himself has stated in Bhagavad Gita (IV–6). The word 'ātmamāyayā' means 'ātmecchayā', (as He likes).

nīl nilattoṭu, Vāṉ viyappa, niṟai perum pōrkaḷ ceytu,
vāṇaṉ āyiram tōḷ tuṇittatum uṭpaṭa, maṟṟum pala-
māṇi āy, nilam koṇṭa-māyaṉ eṉ appaṉ-taṉ māyaṅkaḷē
kāṇum neñcu uṭaiyēṉ-eṉakku iṉi eṉṉa kalakkam uṇṭē?
(VI–4–8)

Translation

Blest with a mind that can envision my wondrous Lord
Who, as Vāmana, got as a gift (from Bali) the whole world
And (as Kṛṣṇa) waged the battle big, the denizens admired
Both in Heaven and Earth and Vāṇaṉ's thousand arms severed,
How can I from mental agitation suffer any longer?

Note

Bāṇāsura was a descendent of Mahā Bali from whom Lord Vāmana Mūrti managed to get the entire land, as gift. The furious battle waged by Lord Kṛṣṇa against Bāṇāsura and

how, in the end, he was let off with a bare four arms, out of the thousand he had, at the special intervention and request of Rudra, have been set out already, in great detail, in the notes below III-10-4.

kalakka ēḻ kaṭal, ēḻ malai, ulaku ēḻum, kaḻiyak kaṭāy,
ulakkat tērkoṭu ceṉṟa māyamum uṭpaṭa maṟṟum pala,
valakkai āḻi, iṭakkaic caṅkam ivai uṭai mālvaṇṇaṉai,
malakkum nā uṭaiyēṟku māṟu uḷatō-im maṇṇiṉ micaiyē?
(VI–4–9)

Translation

By my tongue (love-inspired) I captivate the cloud-hued Lord
Who the discus wields in right hand and the conch in His left,
Who (as Kṛṣṇa) drove to the regions afar, in a chariot deft,
Across the seas seven, the mountains seven and the seven
worlds
And many such wonders did perform; equal unto me
Could there, in all the land, any one be?

Notes

(i) The episode of Śrī Kṛṣṇa going in a chariot, along with a Brahmin and Arjuna, to the ultra-mundane region and restoring to the Brahmin, his missing children, reclaimed from Heaven, has been set forth, in detail, in the notes below III-10-5.

(ii) Saint Nammāḻvār is also known as Parāṅkuśa, the goad weaning round his spiritual antagonists through his scintillating hymns and making the Lord Himself pliable, enraptured by these sweet, love-laden hymns. The significance of this name has well been brought out, in this song. The discus and conch in the Lord's hands typify 'Time' and 'space' or 'infinity' and 'immensity', respectively. As Śrī Parāśara Bhaṭṭar elucidated, while discoursing on this song, it is indeed impossible to enclose and entrap a God of this nature, but the prodigality of a Saint's love does exceed these limits and encompasses even the Infinite. Verily, a God of 'Space' and 'Time' is like a wayward Elephant, roaming at liberty, unrestrained and even such an Elephant, Saint Nammāḻvār, rather Parāṅkuśa, in this context, claims to curb and restrain. That is why he is significantly referring to the cloud-hued Lord along with His attributes, namely, 'Discus' and 'Conch'.

maṇmicaip perum pāram nīṅka, ōr pārata mā perum pōr
paṇṇi, māyaṅkaḷ ceytu, cēṉaiyaip pāḻpaṭa nūṟṟiṭṭup pōy,
viṇmicait taṉa tāmamē puka mēviya cōti-taṉ tāḷ
naṇṇi, nāṉ vaṇaṅkappeṟṟēṉ-eṉakku ār piṟar nāyakarē?
(VI–4–10)

Translation

There's none to order me about, blest that I am to approach
And adore the feet of my resplendent Lord Who rid the Earth
Of its unwholesome burden, thro' the great war of Mahā-
Bhāratha
And its wondrous strategy, with the resolve firm to rout
The armies, one and all, and did later His Celestium reach.

Note

The inhabitants of the Earth having turned out to be unholy and selfish pleasure-seekers, Mother Earth couldn't carry the unwholesome burden. Lord Kṛṣṇa is said to have incarnated, to rid the Earth of this unwholesome burden and the great War of Mahābhārata came in handy for this purpose, the number of survivors on both sides being so sparse that they could easily be counted on one's finger tips. Lord Kṛṣṇa controlled the military strategy, unique in several respects, at every turn and led the Pāṇḍavas to a formal victory. After His hectic deeds, down below, Śrī Kṛṣṇa went back to the Celestium. The Āḻvār exults with chuckling pride, in this song, that he could enjoy the manner of the Lord's descent into this dismal abode of dirt and devilry and His safe return to the Celestium, at the end of His breath-taking activities over here. It is said that, at the happy conclusion of the ten-day festival (Brahmotsava) of Lord Raṅganātha, in Srirangam, two Savants, by name, Mutaliyāṇṭāṉ and Empār, prostrated before each other and got locked up, in an embrace, in grateful acknowledgement of the safe conclusion of the festival of the Lord, of an

extremely delicate Form and that too, in the midst of crores of persons, selfish and egoistic. Nañcīyar, who happened to watch the said rapport between those two God-lovers, passed on the information to others and it has thus been handed down to posterity.

nāyakaṉ muḻu ēḻ ulākukkum āy, muḻu ēḻ ulakum taṉ
vāyakam puka vaittu, umiḻntu, avai āy, avai allaṉum ām
kēcavaṉ aṭi, iṇaimicaik kurukūrc caṭakōpaṉ coṉṉa
tūya āyirattu ip pattāl pattar āvar tuvaḷ iṉṟiyē. (VI–4–11)

Translation

Those that learn these songs ten, out of the immaculate thousand
Composed by Caṭakōpaṉ of Kurukūr, adoring the lovely pair of feet
Of Kēcavaṉ, the Lord Supreme of the entire Universe Who sustained
All the worlds in His stomach and then spat them out,
Who pervades them all and would all the same
From them remain apart, will blemishless devotees become.

Notes

(i) *Blemishless devotees*: Those that learn these songs will be exclusively devoted to Lord Kṛṣṇa, like Saint Nammāḻvār. It is this exclusive devotion like unto that of Toṇṭaraṭippoṭi Āḻvār for the holy Śrīraṅgam, that the word 'blemishless' connotes.

(ii) *The immaculate thousand*: Contrary to his prefatory resolve to write out Śrī Rāma's life story, Śrī Vālmīki introduced quite a few extraneous anecdotes, such as the genesis of Gangā, birth of Kārthikeya and so on. Likewise, Sage Vyāsa made no secret of his intention to tell the story of Lord Nārāyaṇa but got terribly discursive and literally turned his Mahābhārata into a war-memoir, with a bewildering maze of episodes, inter-twined and inter-locked. On the other hand, true to his resolve in 'Tiruviruttam', the first of his four works, that he would sing the praise of 'Tirumāl'

(Mahā Viṣṇu) and nothing but that, *Nammāḻvār kept up the tempo throughout, uninterrupted by anything else* and thus his works became the cream of the whole compendium of 'Divya Prabhandham', even as 'Puruṣa Sūktaṁ' gets the pride of place among the Vedas, 'Manu Smṛti', among the Dharma Śastras, 'Bhagavad Gītā' in Mahābhārata and 'Viṣṇu Purāṇa', among the Purāṇas. Thus 'Tiruvāymoḻi' is *pure and unalloyed.*

Sixth Centum—Fifth Decad (VI-5)
(Tuvaḷ il mā maṇi māṭam)

Preamble

The theme of Nāyaki, Mother and Mate, that is, the Āḻvār expressing himself in the vein of a female lover, her mother and mate, by turns, has already been dealt with, *in extenso*, in the preamble to I-4. Of the hundred decads, comprised in this work, as many as seventeen reflect the 'Nāyakī' aspect, seven are put in the mouth of the Mother and three voiced forth, by the mates. Taking this Sixth Centum alone, VI-1, VI-2 and VI-8 are the utterances of Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī, this one, the song of the mate while VI-6 and VI-7 are ascribed to the Mother. Thus, this centum reflects all the three types, like the fourth centum. As already elucidated, all these songs were, of course, the compositions of the Āḻvār, though ascribed to three different agencies, like unto the waters of the main river being conveyed through different channels. But then, let us now examine the necessity for the songs, in this decad, being put in the mouth of the mate.

In V-6, we saw the Lord's glory and grandeur, enumerated by Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī, possessed by the Lord. And now, the Āḻvār wishes to give expression to the depth of his love unto God. This only redounds to the greatness of the Lord, because all the auspicious qualities of the Lord and His unique prowess will go unheard, unnoticed and unsung but for His devotees who can revel in them and recount, just like the cool southerly breeze blowing in a depopulated place like the forest or the moonshine in the wilderness. Did not Periyāḻvār, in his opening song of benediction,

pray for long life for himself also, so that he could keep on singing the Lord's praise and praying for His safety? Is not Saint Nammāḻvār the Lord's poet and will not the Āḻvār's greatness be, therefore, but a reflection of the Lord's own? Even so, it would not be quite appropriate for him to sing his own glory, albeit the reflected glory of God. And so, the mates are pressed into service and, in essence, it is the exposition of the Āḻvār's God-love, God-hunger and God-thirst, by some of the devotees. Thus, in this decad, the mates are telling the elderly women around about the profusion of the Āḻvār's love unto the Lord, enshrined in 'Tolai—villimaṅkalam', a pilgrim centre in the deep South (Tamilnādu) near about Āḻvār Tirunakari (Kurukūr), the birth place of the Āḻvār.

tuvaḷ il mā maṇi māṭam ōṅku tolaivillimaṅkalam toḻum
ivaḷai nīr iṉi, aṉṉaimīr! umakku ācai illai; viṭumiṉō-
tavaḷa oṇ caṅku, cakkaram eṉṟum, tāmarait taṭam kaṇ eṉṟum,
kuvaḷai oṇ malark kaṇkaḷ nīr malka, niṉṟu niṉṟu kumuṟumē.
(VI–5–1)

Translation

Ye, mothers, this lady is unto you lost henceforth,
Better give up all hopes of her, who the Lord does adore
In Tolaivillimaṅkalam where stand tall castles paved with gems flawless,
With a mind that whirls and tears welling in her flowery eyes;
Utter she can't the words she feels the urge to express,
"The Lord's lotus eyes broad and His lovely white conch and discus".

Note

King Janaka showed the horoscope of baby Sītā to the court astrologers. While predicting her great good fortune of getting married to the Supreme Lord and all that, they also foretold her exile into the forests. So also, when Caṭakōpaṉ was born, his parents elicited from the astrologers that he would be endowed with supreme knowledge and become world famous and yet, there was the great risk of their losing

him, if ever they took him to Tolaivillimaṅkalam. The devout parents could not, however, resist the natural urge to take their child to the shrine in the forbidden place, come what may. The high destiny of the God-bound souls and their aim, none and nothing can avert. The resultant position, insofar as Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī is concerned, the prophesy come true, is set out here by her mates. Actually, the mates come into the picture, only when the elderly women seek their aid for finding a way out of the trance-state into which the Nāyakī has worked herself up, on seeing minutely every little bit of the pilgrim centre, the temple and the Deity. Temples and pilgrim centres are not places to hurry through, like a race-horse, but to be paced through leisurely, reverentially beholding the towers and turrets. The buildings loom large in the rapturous eyes of the Nāyakī and look like tall castles, paved with flawless rubies. And then, she beholds the Lord's enthralling Form, His holy weapons and ornaments and gets completely absorbed in admiration of them all. She stands isolated from her folks and finding that she has gone out of hand, the elders seek the good offices of her mates to pull her out of this engrossment. But the mates haven't anything encouraging to say nor is there any point in putting up a bund after all the water has escaped. They do not mince matters either; they admonish the elders for having brought the Nāyakī to this pilgrim centre, knowing full well her susceptibilities. At the same time, the mates throw a very useful hint to the elders, that they would do well to follow in the Nāyakī's foot-steps and get absorbed in the Deity and the surroundings, rather than give her up, as incorrigible. It is indeed a sight for Gods, the ravishing love of the Saint, throbbing with God-love, during those blissful moments of communion with the Lord. The Elders are, therefore, advised by the mates to behold, with admiration, the rapturous state of the Nāyakī whose expression falters, choked with emotion, like unto a cow, whose calf is tethered, away from her, pining for the calf to be fed with the milk welling up her teats and yet, unable to express, by mouth, her painful longing to reach her calf.

kumuṟum ōcai viḻavu olit tolaivillimaṅkalam koṇṭupukku,
amuta meṉ moḻiyāḷai nīr umakku ācai iṉṟi akaṟṟiṉīr-
timir koṇṭāl ottu niṟkum; maṟṟu ivaḷ tēva tēvapirāṉ eṉṟē
nimiyum vāyoṭu, kaṇkaḷ nīr malka, nekku, ocintu, karaiyumē.
(VI–5–2)

Translation

Ye, elders, brought you have to a point of no return,
This lady with a tongue, sweet and soft, having taken
Her to Tolaivillimaṅkalam with its fan-fare of festivals;
Dazed she remains and mention of the name of the Lord universal
Twists her mouth and brings forth tears in abundance
From her eyes and keeps she withering down.

Notes

(i) Even the normal environment of Tolaivillimaṅkalam is enticing enough and what to talk of the festivities, with their rich and varied fares! The elders having brought the God-bent Nāyakī during the festival going on there, they stand no chance whatever of weaning her away from the Lord and the allied attractions. Incidentally, we get at the Śāstraik meaning that we would do well to get initiated into God-head through our elders, rather than the direct approach.

(ii) Could there be a tongue sweeter than that of the Lord's poet, singing the glory of that Insatiable Nectar? For the devout, the Āḷvār provides the nectarean hymns to drink deep from.

(iii) The Nāyakī stands speechless like the profound Brahma Jñāni who scarcely speaks out. In the sixth prapāṭaka of Cāndogyopaniṣad, Svetaketu comes home after undergoing a twelve-year course of instruction (Gurukulavāsa) and finding him tongue-tied, his father instantly perceives that the boy has acquired Brahma Jñāna.

karai koḷ paim poḻil taṇ paṇait tolaivillimaṅkalam koṇṭupukku,
urai koḷ iṉ moḻiyāḷai nīr umakku ācai iṉṟi akaṟṟiṉīr-
tirai koḷ pauvattuc cērntatum, ticai ñālam tāvi aḷantatum,
niraikaḷ mēyttatumē pitaṟṟi, neṭum kaṇ nīr malka, niṟkumē.
(VI–5–3)

Translation

Ye, mothers, your hold on this sweet-tongued lady is gone,
For you brought her to Tolaivillimaṅkalam with fertile fields and orchards fine,
On the river bank; utter she does how unto the Milky-ocean
The Lord came, how He spanned the sprawling Earth and grazed
The cattle herds and as tears well up her longish eyes, she stands dazed.

Notes

(i) *Sweet tongued*: The Āḷvār's hymns are very sweet to hear and when one delves into their meanings, the commentaries, however numerous and copious they might be, one cannot plumb their depth fully.

(ii) The elders cannot coax the Nāyakī and get her dislodged from this pilgrim centre, even as it would not be possible to induce the fertile fields and the orchards fed by the waters from the river Tāmraparṇi to get uprooted and proceed with them; in other words, the Nāyakī stands as firmly rooted there as the fields and orchards themselves.

niṟkum nālmaṟaivāṇar vāḻ tolaivillimaṅkalam kaṇṭapiṉ,
aṟkam oṉṟum aṟa uṟāḷ-malintāḷ kaṇṭīr ivaḷ-aṉṉaimīr!
kaṟkum kalvi ellām karuṅ kaṭal-vaṇṇaṉ, kaṇṇapirāṉ eṉṟē
oṟkam oṉṟum ilaḷ; ukantu ukantu, uḷ makiḻntu, kuḻaiyumē.
(VI–5–4)

Translation

Ye, elders, this lady has ceased to be modest in the least
After beholding Tolaivillimaṅkalam, the Vedic scholars' seat;
All her talks centre round Kaṇṇapirāṉ, the sea-hued Lord
And with no reserve, she thaws down, overjoyed.

Note

The Nāyakī was overwhelmed by the sweet chanting of the Vedas in Tolaivillimaṅkalam and she started musing over the Lord Who disseminated the Vedas, at the commencement of the epoch, to the four-headed Brahmā. Her innate modesty is no longer there, in her present rapturous state, and she openly rejoices, speaking solely about the Lord, the ultimate goal of all learning and knowledge.

kuḷaiyum vāḷ-mukattu-ēḻaiyait tolaivillimaṅkalam koṇṭupukku,
iḷai koḷ cōtic centāmaraik kaṇ-pirāṉ iruntamai kāṭṭiṉīr;
maḻai peytāl okkum kāṇṇa nīriṉoṭu aṉṟu toṭṭum maiyāntu ivaḷ
nuḷaiyum cintaiyaḷ, aṉṉaimīr! toḻum-at ticai uṟṟu nōkkiyē.
(VI–5–5)

Translation

Ye, mothers, this lady with forehead bright, deeply absorbed
In the Lord's auspicious traits, unto Tolaivillimaṅkalam you brought
And showed her the lotus-eyed Lord of bejewelled radiance;
Rapturous she is since, with tears torrential in her eyes
And with a heart in His beauty rooted, in that very direction she gazes.

Notes

(i) The effulgence of the God-love within is reflected on the Nāyakī's forehead. By her very nature, she would thaw down in ecstasy, in deep contemplation of the Lord and now that she has been brought by the elders, face to face, with the radiant Lord, bedecked with jewels, at Tolaivillimaṅkalam, her God-intoxication has gone to a very high pitch. The Lord, even when unadorned, is extremely charming and now, He is adorned, imparting lustre to the Jewels on His person. Unto Him, so exquisite, the elders brought the Nāyakī who just fainted in ecstasy and even after she recovered, she would not lift her mind off Him and kept gazing in the direction of the Pilgrim centre. c.f. 'Ekastha hṛdayā nūnaṁ Rāmamevānupaśyati' (Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa, Sundara Kāṇḍa) So then, the chances of the elders getting the Nāyakī restored to them were next to nil. The Nāyakī's love is unceasingly whirling, like the whirlpool in a stream, boring deeper and deeper but never scattering and passing away.

(ii) *The torrential tears*: When Maṇakkāl Nampi discoursed about God, Āḷavantār (later, Saint Yāmunācārya), the Royal listener caught the spark all right and exclaimed that he Just can't exist without beholding Him. Struck by this wonderful response, the great preceptor led Āḷavantār to the august presence of Lord Raṅganātha, on seeing Whom, Yāmuna broke into tears, full and flooding. Like unto the dry match-stick, which readily strikes fire, the devout have but to be told about God and the heart immediately yearns to see Him; He has but to be seen and it makes them weep with tears of joy like Saint Nammāḻvār.

nōkkum pakkam ellām karumpoṭu cennel ōṅku centāmarai
vāykkum taṇ poruṇal vaṭakarai vaṇ tolaivillimaṅkalam
nōkkumēl, at ticai allāl, maṟu nōkku ilaḷ; vaikal nāḷtōṟum
vāykkoḷ vācakamum maṇivaṇṇaṉ nāmamē ivaḷ, aṉṉaimīr!
(VI–5–6)

Translation

Ye, elders, off Tolaivillimaṅkalam, the lovely city on the north bank
Of the cool Porunal, full of red lotus flowers in the tanks,
Where stand Sugar-canes and paddy crops tall, where'er one turns,
This young lady, her eyes can't lift and utters she the words,
At all times, spelling out only the names of the gem-hued Lord.

Notes

(i) Mostly, the Nāyakī is in a trance state and she seldom opens her eyes; if ever she did open the eyes and saw anything, it was only this pilgrim centre with its romantic setting on the north bank of Tāmraparṇi (also known as Porunal), the cool river. If she opened her mouth, she would only spell out the Lord's glorious names. Well, these are the observations of the mate.

(ii) In its esoteric meaning, the sweet sugar-cane denotes the devout, with a sweet bearing and disposition; the rich paddy crops, bent with the weight of the grains on the stalks, betoken the men of great learning, full of humility.

aṉṉaimīr! aṇi mā mayil ciṟumāṉ ivaḷ nammaik kaivalintu,
eṉṉa vārttaiyum kēṭkuṟāḷ, tolaivillimaṅkalam eṉṟu allāl;
muṉṉam nōṟṟa vitikolō? mukil-vaṇṇaṉ māyam kolō? avaṉ
ciṉṉamum tirunāmamum ivaḷ vāyaṉakaḷ tiruntavē. (VI–5–7)

Translation

Ye, mothers, this lady sweet, like the lovely peacock and the doe young,
Has out of our hands gone and she wouldn't hear about anything
But Tolaivillimaṇkalam; could this felicity on her devolve
By dint of accumulated merit or the cloud-hued Lord's sweet resolve?
How distinct does she spell out His names and attributes!

Notes

(i) The Nāyakī's lovely locks of hair are compared to the colourful plumes of the peacock and her bewitching eyes to those of the young doe.

(ii) The Lord's names and attributes gain colour, when they are spelt out by His devotees with inimitable fervour, as when Śrī Parāśara Bhaṭṭar sweetly ejaculated the holy name, "Aḻakiya maṇavāḷapperumāḷ!" (Lovely Spouse), Śrī Śomāśi Āṇṭāṉ entoned "Emperumāṉār!" (My own Lord, an epithet of Śrī Rāmānuja) and Anantāḻvaṉ uttered the holy name "Tiruvēṅkaṭam uṭaiyāṉ!" (The Lord of the holy hill, Tirupathi). It has been said that Vālmīki Bhagavān could impart special lustre to Rāmāyaṇa. The mate wonders whether all this felicity, the Nāyakī currently enjoys, could have accrued to her, by dint of her own merit and is led to think that it could be but the Lord's sweet spontaneous grace.

tiruntu vētamum, vēḷviyum, tiru mā makaḷirum tām malintu
iruntu vāḻ porunal vaṭakarai vaṇ tolaivillimaṅkalam
karun taṭam kaṇṇi kaitoḻuta an nāḷ toṭaṅki iṉ nāḷtoṟum
iruntu iruntu, aravintalōcaṉa! eṉṟu eṉṟē naintu, iraṅkumē.
(VI–5–8)

Translation

Ye, elders, ever since this lady, with dark eyes large,
Started adoring Tolaivillimaṅkalam, the affluent city
On the north bank of river Porunal, full of felicity,
With scrupulous vedic chantings and rituals well done,
She calls out now and then, 'My lotus-eyed Lord', and dwindles down.

Note

The Nāyakī's eyes became dark through their absorption of, and deep penetration into the dark-hued Lord. From the moment, she worshipped the Lord, enshrined in this pilgrim centre, she got entranced by His lotus eyes and thawed down, when she addressed Him, as her lotus-eyed Lord. She couldn't go on repeating it, much as she would like to, as she dwindled down in a state of ecstasy.

iraṅki, nāḷtoṟum vāyverīi, ivaḷ kaṇṇa nīrkaḷ alamara,
maraṅkaḷum iraṅkum vakai, maṇivaṇṇavo! eṉṟu kūvumāl;
turaṅkam vāy piḷantāṉ uṟai tolaivillimaṅkalam eṉṟu, taṉ
karaṅkaḷ kūppit toḻum-avvūrt tirunāmam kaṟṟataṉ piṉṉaiyē.
(VI–5–9)

Translation

Ye, mothers, this young lady calls out, "oh, gem-hued Lord!"
Day in and day out, with her mind deeply absorbed,
And tears splashing down her eyes, moving trees besides;
Ever since she learnt the name of that city, Tolaivillimaṅkalam, where resides
The Lord who tore open the mouth of the demoniac horse,
In that direction she turns and with joined palms adores.

Note

Having been initiated into this pilgrim centre, the Nāyakī keeps on reciting the Lord's name, in such a manner that even the

inanimate beings, like trees, are moved. If these hymns can move even the stony hearts of the uninitiated men of the present day, what doubt could there be about their impact on the contemporary men and things, when the songs flowed from the Āḷvār's rapturous lips! When Lord Kṛṣṇa played on the flute, Periyāḷvār would have it, that the trees shed honey in copious quantities, the flowers started falling down and the boughs bent down, in admiration. The voice of the yearning soul of the Āḷvār, with its mellifluity galore, would have doubtless made things around him react likewise. In fact, the mate says 'that city', in line 4 of the song, because she cannot reproduce the sweetness with which the Nāyakī spells out 'Tiruttolaivillimaṅkalam.'

piṉṉaikol, nila mā makaḷkol, tirumakaḷkol, piṟantiṭṭāḷ?
eṉṉa māyam kolō! ivaḷ neṭumāḷ eṉṟē niṉṟu kūvumāḷ;
muṉṉi vantu, avaṉ niṉṟu, iruntu, uṟaiyum tolaivillimaṅkalam
ceṉṉiyāl vaṇaṅkum; avvūrt tirunāmam kēṭpatu cintaiyē.
(VI–5–10)

Translation

Perhaps this lady is Piṉṉai or Nīlamakaḷ (Mother Earth), full of grace
Or Tirumakaḷ (Mahālakṣmī) herself, what a wonder it is, she keeps calling out
Neṭumāl (the all-pervading Lord) and bows before Tolaivillimaṅkalam where He stays,
And longs to hear the holy name of that place, by others spelt out!

Notes

(i) Looking at the Nāyakī's intense longing for Lord Kṛṣṇa, the mates guess that she might be Nappiṉṉā, reborn; and then, her rapturous meditation on the Lord's advent as Varāha, the Great Boar, makes them inclined to think that she might be an incarnation of Mother Earth. But still, the mates could not make up their minds, as the Nāyakī's devout contemplation of Lord Rāmā suggests the possibility of her being no less than Sītā, reborn. In his inimitable way, Nampiḷḷai would say that these divine consorts could, in certain respects, be compared to Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī, but she is of such incomparable excellence that one is left wondering whether she has taken this unique birth for the resuscitation of the whole world. What a wonder it is! Of course, anything can take place in the Lord's Universe.

(ii) Her own love for the Lord is of enormous dimensions and yet, the Nāyakī is overwhelmed by the Lord's love for her and calls Him out, in terms of His tall love, the all-conquering.

(iii) The Nāyakī loves to hear the name of this pilgrim centre, uttered by some one instead of mouthing it herself. The Lord is said to have come down to Tolaivillimaṅkalam and taken up His residence there, well ahead of the Nāyakī, so as to prepare the ground for the generation, in her, of such intense God-love.

cintaiyālum collālum ceykaiyiṉālum tēva pirānaiyē
tantai tāy eṉṟu aṭainta vaṇ kurukūravar caṭakōpaṉ
muntai āyirattuḷ ivai tolaivillimaṅkalattaic coṉṉa
centamiḻp pattum vallār aṭimaiceyvār tirumālukkē. (VI–5–11)

Translation

Those that can recite these songs ten,
Which unto holy Tolaivillimaṅkalam pertain,
Out of the hoary thousand composed by Caṭakōpaṉ
Of Kurukūr, who, by word, deed and thought, adored
The Lord Supreme as Father, Mother and all, rolled
In one, will service unto Him render for ever.

Note

The hoary thousand: It might be asked how this work is claimed to be antiquated while there is the distinct reference to Āḷvār as its author. The element of antiquity comes in automatically if one considers the parity, which this Dramiḍa Veda enjoys with its Sanskrit counterpart. These thousand hymns were ordained by the Lord, just like the Sanskrit Vedas, as

revealed by His own words in Bhagavad Gītā, "Śrutis smṛtir Mamaivājñā'; the veracity and blemishlessness, claimed for the Sanskrit Vedas, hold good equally for the Dramiḍa Veda (See aphorism 45 of Ācārya Hṛdayam).

The chanters of this decad will be blest to render service unto the Divine couple, without break or blemish, as Lakṣmaṇa did.

Sixth Centum—Sixth Decad (VI-6)
(Mālukku, vaiyam aḷanta)

Preamble

The last decad was put in the mouth of the mates of Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī, while, in the current decad, it is her mother who speaks out the desperate condition of her love-lorn daughter. The manner in which the Nāyakī is dwindling down, losing, one by one, her feminine charms and embellishments, is set out, stanza by stanza. As a matter of fact, in IV-8 ante, these very things which now get dropped off, were despised by the Nāyakī, as not worth possessing, insofar as they had no bearing on Divine Service. As she meditates on the wondrous deeds, performed by the Lord, in each of His various Incarnations and the special traits then exhibited by Him, the Nāyakī goes into raptures and her body thaws down and dwindles.

mālukku, vaiyam aḷanta maṇāḷaṟku,
nīlak karu niṟa mēka niyāyaṟku,
kōlac centāmaraik kaṇṇaṟku, eṉ koṅku alar
ēlak kuḻali iḻantatu-caṅkē. (VI–6–1)

Translation

Engrossed is my daughter, whose fragrant locks are with flowers bedecked,
In the cloud-hued Lord with lotus eyes red,
The Spouse, Who the entire Earth once measured,
Full of love unto His devotees and she has her bangles lost.

Note

The Nāyakī withers down, as she gets absorbed in the Lord's features, His attributes and deeds. The head acquires elegance because of the locks of hair. Again, that head is praiseworthy, which bows down in reverence and thus, locks which impart beauty to the head, correspond to the reverential attitude, which makes the head worth its while.

caṅku, vil, vāḷ, taṇṭu, cakkarak kaiyaṟku,
ceṅkaṉivāyc ceyya tāmaraik kaṇṇaṟku,
koṅku alar taṉ am tuḷāy muṭiyāṉukku, eṉ
maṅkai iḻantatu-māmai niṟamē. (VI–6–2)

Translation

Meditating on the Lord with lovely lips and lotus eyes red,
On whose crown is the tuḷaci garland, cool and lovely, which honey sheds,
Who, the conch, the bow, the sword, the mace and discus wields,
My daughter has lost her complexion fair.

Note

Pining for communion with the Lord of such enchanting description, who spanned the worlds, the Nāyakī is off colour. So says the Mother.

niṟam kariyāṉukku, nīṭu ulaku uṇṭa
tiṟam kiḷar vāyc ciṟuk-kaḷvaṉ-avaṟku,
kaṟaṅkiya cakkarak kaiyavaṉukku, eṉ
piṟaṅku irum kūntal iḻantatu-pīṭē. (VI–6–3)

Translation

With her thoughts centred on the dark-hued Lord,
Who the discus dynamic does in His hand hold,
Whose lips suggest His having gulped down all the worlds,
Who, in His stomach small, hid many a big world,
My daughter with dense locks lovely, has her majestic bearing lost.

Note

The Lord, as the great Saviour, sustained all the worlds, with their variegated contents, in His stomach, during the deluge. And yet, the Nāyakī distressingly feels that it is all mere story, inasmuch as He has failed to extend to her the protection she badly needs.

pītu uṭai nāṉmukaṉaip paṭaittāṉukku,
māṭu uṭai vaiyam aḷanta maṇālaṟku,
nāṭu uṭai maṉṉarkkut tūtu cel nampikku, eṉ
pāṭu uṭai alkul iḷantatu-paṇpē. (VI-6-4)

Translation

My daughter, with broad tummy, has her natural pose lost,
Steeped in thoughts of the Lord Who from His navel did create
The majestic Nāṉmukaṉ (Brahmā), the Spouse Who the rich Earth spanned
And for the landed monarchs ran an errand.

Notes

(i) The Nāyakī's natural composure undergoes alarming modifications, as she keeps meditating on the Lord's traits, one by one.

(ii) Lord Kṛṣṇa ran an errand on behalf of the Pāṇḍavas, who would not be granted by their cousin, Duryodhana, even a square inch of land, not even a chair to sit on. And yet, the Pāṇḍavas are referred to, as the landed monarchs, in this song, as the Lord was on their side. The Nāyakī has just been thrown off her feet by the Lord's exhibition of such amazing condescension as running an errand and doing the meanest of jobs for His devotees.

paṇpu uṭai vētam payanta paraṉukku,
maṇ purai vaiyam iṭanta varākaṟku,
teṇ puṉal-paḷḷi em tēva pirāṉukku, eṉ
kaṇpuṉai kōtai iḷantatu-kaṟpē. (VI-6-5)

Translation

My daughter, with locks attractive, has been thrown
Into mental imbalance, steeped in deep meditation
Of the Lord Supreme, Who did on limpid waters vast recline,
Who, as the Great Boar, did the earthen world lift
And (unto Brahmā) the sanctified Vedas did gift.

Note

The Śāstras have brought out the Lord's remarkable attention for His devotees' well-being and the various acts of benefaction, performed by Him for them. The mother now says that her daughter (Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī) has, in her present state of dejection, lost the perspective and begun to doubt seriously the veracity of these statements. She is perhaps inclined to think that Sages Vyāsa, Parāśara and Vālmiki might have been hired out by the Lord to say quite a few good things about Him, which, in reality, do not hold good.

kaṟpakak kā aṉa nal-pala tōḷaṟku,
poṉ-cuṭark kuṉṟu aṉṉa pūn taṉ muṭiyaṟku,
nal-pala tāmarai nāḷ-malark kaiyaṟku, eṉ
vil-puruvakkoṭi tōṟṟatu meyyē. (VI-6-6)

Translation

My tender daughter, with bow-like brows lovely, has lost control
Over her body, buried in meditation of the Lord, sweet to behold,
With shoulders many, like an orchard and arms like lotus, in fresh bloom,
Wearing the crown lovely which does like a gold mount gleam.

Note

(i) The loss of control over the body denotes the Nāyakī's state of ecstasy, when she is entirely beside herself. It is indeed a remarkable irony that the Nāyakī, from whom the Lord cannot bear being apart even for a split second, should get lost in meditation of the exquisite form of the Lord, whereas Sita said, as reported

by Hanumān, that she could wait for a month for her reclamation by Rāma.

(ii) The Nāyaki's brow has the reputation of making the Lord turn His attention in the direction of her glance, as indicated by the twist of her brow. This ensures the influx of the Lord's grace on all those associated with the Āḻvār.

mey amar pal kalaṉ naṉku aṇintāṉukku,
pai araviṉ aṇaip paḷḷiyiṉāṉukku,
kaiyoṭu kāl ceyya kaṇṇa-pirāṉukku, eṉ
taiyal iḻantatu-taṉṉuṭaic cāyē. (VI–6–7)

Translation

Gone is the charisma of my daughter, entranced by thoughts
Of Kaṇṇaṉ whose hands and feet are red,
Who lay on the hooded serpent, His lovely bed,
Wearing many a jewel, well matched with His Form exquisite.

Note

The Nāyaki's mother says that her daughter sincerely believed that all these enchanting features were possessed by the Lord, only to hold a rapport with her and now that it has turned out to be otherwise, she feels frustrated and withers down.

cāyak kuruntam ocitta tamiyaṟku,
māyac cakaṭam utaitta maṉāḷaṟku,
pēyaip piṇampaṭap pāl uṇ piṟāṉukku, eṉ
vācak kuḻali iḻantatu-māṇpē. (VI–6–8)

Translation

My daughter with fragrant locks has her grandeur lost,
With a mind poised in the Lord Who the twin trees did uproot,
The Spouse who to pieces dashed the wicked demon in the wheel
And sucked unto death the breast of Pūthanā, the devil.

Note

The mother regretfully watches the present miserable condition of her love-smitten daughter, shorn of all her erstwhile grace and grandeur.

māṇpu amai kōlattu em māyak kuṟaḷaṟku,
cēṇ cuṭark kuṉṟu aṉṉa ceñcuṭar mūrttikku,
kāṇ perum tōṟṟattu em kākutta nampikku, eṉ
pūṇ puṇai meṉmulai tōṟṟatu-poṟpē. (VI–6–9)

Translation

My bejewelled daughter, with slender breasts, has lost all her charm,
Wrapt in thoughts of Kākuttan (Lord Rāma) of exquisite Form,
Radiant like red blaze, the shining mount tall,
Vāmana, the wondrous, whose charm did enthral one and all.

Note

Says the mother, in a fit of depression: "Although born to entice the Lord by her amazing beauty, yet my daughter has now lost all her beauty, wrapt in thoughts of the handsome Lord".

poṟpu amai nīḷmuṭip pūn taṇ tuḻāyaṟku,
mal-poru tōḷ uṭai māyap pirāṉukku,
niṟpaṉa pal uruvāy niṟkum māyaṟku, eṉ
kaṟpu uṭaiyāṭṭi iḻantatu-kaṭṭē. (VI–6–10)

Translation

Stripped of all her attainments stands my daughter of knowledge sound,
Wrapped in thoughts of the wondrous Lord, Who does abound
In one and all, still and mobile, wearing the tuḷaci garland
Cool and lovely, on His crown, tall and majestic, whose shoulders
Are more than a match for the world's most mighty wrestlers.

Note

Having singled out the loss suffered by the entranced Nāyaki, in each of the preceding songs, the Mother now says that her daughter has indeed lost all her feminine attainments, without any exception. The Lord's crown, by itself, is exceedingly attractive and the tuḷaci garland, worn on it, enhances its grandeur still further, keeping the Nāyakī spell-bound.

kaṭṭu eḻil-cōlai nal vēṅkaṭavāṇaṇaik
kaṭṭu eḻil-teṉ kurukūrc caṭakōpaṉ col
kaṭṭu eḻil āyirattu ip pattum vallavar
kaṭṭu eḻil vāṉavar pōkam uṇpārē. (VI–6–11)

Translation

Those that are well-versed in these songs ten,
Out of the thousand, metrically excellent, composed by Caṭa-kōpaṉ Of Kurukūr with its ramparts lovely, in adoration
Of the Lord at Tiruvēṅkaṭam, with orchards full of fragrance,
Will on a par with Celestials enjoy heavenly bliss *par excellence*.

Note

The Lord at Tiruvēṅkaṭam is referred to, but once, in this decad, and that too, in the end-song. This is similar to the solitary mention of this Deity, made in the opening song of III-9.

Sixth Centum—Seventh Decad (VI-7)
(Uṇṇum Cōṟu, Parukum nīr)

Preamble

The mother continues her narration, in this decad also. She lay beside her love-lorn daughter, soothing her, as best as could be done. But suddenly, the mother groped the bed next to hers and discovered that her daughter was not in it. The former searched for the latter, high and low, but in vain. The mother was, however, well aware of her daughter's exuberance of love for the Lord, enshrined at Tirukkōḷūr and, therefore, rightly concluded that the Nāyakī should have gone there. The Nāyakī's extraordinary devotion to that pilgrim centre is now voiced forth by the mother. Actually, the Āḻvār's longing for incessant communion with the Lord at Tirukkōḷūr finds expression, in this decad, the mother functioning as but the mouthpiece.

uṇṇum cōṟu, parukum nīr, tiṉṉum veṟṟilaiyum, ellām
kaṇṇaṉ em perumāṉ eṉṟu eṉṟē, kaṇkaḷ nīr malki,
maṇṇiṉuḷ avaṉ cīr vaḷam mikkavaṉ ūr viṉavi,
tiṇṇam eṉ iḷamāṉ pukum ūr-tirukkōḷūrē. (VI–7–1)

Translation

'Tis certain that my daughter like unto the doe young,
Who, with tears welling up her eyes, always keeps saying,
Kaṇṇaṉ is unto her the food of the hungry, beverage of the thirsty
And the betel chewed for pleasure, has, after due enquiry,
Gone to Tirukkōḷūr where resides the Lord, grand and majestic.

Notes

(i) The famous author of 'Ācārya Hṛdayam' has succinctly brought out the superior excellence of the Āḻvār vis-a-vis the Ṛṣis. Whereas the Ṛṣis subsisted on the forest produce, such as roots, fruits etc, Lord Kṛṣṇa was the sole Sustainer for Nammāḻvār, the very food needed for appeasing hunger, the water required for quenching thirst and the betels one chews for pleasure, the one and only source catering to his God-hunger, God-thirst and God-love. The Āḻvār was 'Kṛṣṇa tṛṣṇā tatva', the very personification of God-love. Unto him, Vāsudeva was all, "Vāsudevas sarvamiti". The gnostic mother was, therefore, quite sure that her daughter of such a disposition would have found her way, after due enquiry, to Tirukkōḷūr, the place where the Lord exhibits the exuberance of His wealth and auspicious qualities, in super-abundance.

(ii) An interesting question was posed by Āḷavantār (Saint Yāmunācārya) to his audience, as to which of the two, Saint Nammāḻvār who looked upon God as his food etc., or Saint Tirumaṅkai Āḻvār who exclaimed that the Lord had stolen away his soul, they had to be more apprehensive about. They observed. "We have indeed to fear more, the former's precipitate flight, alone and unaided, to the shrine at Tirukkōḷūr, than for the latter who is already in the company of the Lord at Tiruvāli, no matter how the union came about, stealth or otherwise. Our sympathies are naturally with Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī, on her lone journey, in quest of the Lord of her heart". The great master, however, thought otherwise; according to him, there was the fear

of Tirumaṅkai Āḻvār and the Lord getting into a state of delirium on account of their rapturous reciprocation of ravishing love, a state of inebriation or stupor, such as the addicts of dōtura-narcotic fall into. The plight of Saint Tirumaṅkai Āḻvār, drowned in love, therefore, excited their fear more than that of Saint Nammāḻvār who was yet lonely and self-conscious, full of ardent expectation of meeting his beloved Lord.

(iii) The eyes of the Saints, soaked in God-love, swim with pearls of tears of delight. As Mahābhārata puts it, even God-Science, such as Upanishads, is remote from the ambrosia of Lord Hari's narratives, if it fails to melt the heart, wet the eye and thrill the frame. Nañcīyar used to say: "Thrice did I go over the treatise of Tiruvāymoḻi with Tirunaraiyūr Araiyar but none of the teachings did affect and melt my heart so much as when I actually witnessed him once, when explaining a passage, transported into the region of ecstasy, with tears rolling down the cheek".

(iv) A native of Tirukkōḷūr left the holy land and employed himself elsewhere, tilling the land. Anantāḻvān, a great devotee, who happened to see him, enquired where he came from. On learning that the man hailed from Tirukkōḷūr, Anantāḻvāṉ grew furious and exclaimed that one could as well graze a couple of asses, staying in that holy land and eke out one's livelihood, rather than forsake the land of eternal living where the Eternal Master stays, in all His splendour. Similarly, when Saint Rāmānuja was proceeding to Tirukkōḷūr, he saw a woman coming from the opposite direction and elicited from her that she was actually coming from holy Tirukkōḷūr. The Saint exclaimed, in great surprise "What, is it at all possible for those who have once taken their abode in that holy place to leave it ?"

(v) Tirukkōḷūr is one of the eighteen pilgrim centres of Pāṇḍiya nādu. It is also the birthplace of Maturakavi Āḻvār.

ūrum, nāṭum, ulakamum, taṉṉaippōl avaṉuṭaiya
pērum tārkaḷumē pitaṟṟa, kaṟpu vāṉ iṭaṟi,
cērum nal vaḷam cēr paḻaṉat tirukkōḷūrkkē
pōrum kol, uraiyīr, koṭiyēṉ koṭi-pūvaikaḷē? (VI-7-2)

Translation

Ye, Pūvai birds, this sinner's daughter, who makes
The whole world, hall and hamlet, prattle like herself the Lord's names
And His insignia, breaking the bounds of modesty, has it seems
Reached Tirukkōḷūr, rich and fertile; will you unto me utter
If she would at least for your sake come back here?

Notes

(i) The mother enquiries of the little pūvai birds, the playmates of Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī, whether she would come back, at least for their sake. She is so dazed that she is not conscious of the fact that she can't expect a reply from the speechless birds.

(ii) The mother is at a loss to understand why her daughter should at all go elsewhere, in search of the Godly, having herself induced God-consciousness in one and all, in her native place itself, where every one keeps uttering the Lord's holy names and attributes like her. It is noteworthy that, to saints, the utterance of the holy name of God is so preciously sweet that they imagine, the whole world sings forth like themselves. The world is indeed acceptable to them when they invest it with their own divine sentiments and see God everywhere; otherwise, it becomes detestable, just like the Kingdom of Ayodhya itself, detested by Bharata, when Rāma was not there. Śrī Nampiḷḷai puts it that the mother questions the necessity for the Nāyakī going all the way to Tirukkōḷūr, while she could as well enjoy all that felicity in her native surroundings, the mutual enlightenment and entertainment in the domain of God-love, in the company of kindred souls.

pūvai, paiṅkiḷikaḷ, pantu, tūtai, pūm puṭṭilkaḷ,
yāvaiyum tirumāl tirunāmaṅkaḷē kūvi, eḷum eṉ
pāvai-pōy iṉit taṉ paḷaṉat tirukkōḷūrkkē–
kōvai vāy tuṭippa, maḷaikkaṇṇoṭu eṉ ceyyum kolō? (VI–7–3)

Translation

All that joy one derives from the articles of sport,
The ball, flower basket, cooking pots, little birds and parrots,
In singing the Lord's holy names my daughter would have,
And yet, I know not how she would actually fare
In Tirukkōḷūr, cool and fertile, with trembling lips red and tearful eyes.

Note

The mother says: " Even in her childhood days, when one could expect her to play with toys, my daughter revelled in singing the Lord's holy names. It is not as if she was devoid of the means of sustenance and had to go elsewhere, in search of it. I don't know why she has at all gone to Tirukkōḷūr ".

kollai eṉparkolō-kuṇam mikkaṉaḷ eṉpar kolō-
cillai vāyp peṇṭukaḷ, ayal-cēri uḷḷārum? ellē!
celvam malki avaṉ kiṭanta tirukkōḷūrkkē
mel iṭai nuṭaṅka iḷamāṉ cella mēviṉaḷē! (VI–7–4)

Translation

My daughter, like unto the doe young, has her mind made up
To go to plentiful Tirukkōḷūr where reclines the Lord,
Straining her waist thin; I know not whether the local gossips
And neighbouring women will praise her as Godly
Or condemn her as immodest and unruly.

Note

There are two ways of looking at the Nāyaki's behaviour. Those who have unflinching faith in salvation through the Lord's redemptive grace and await the descent of such grace on them, in due course, would certainly not countenance the Nāyaki running about, courting the Lord, while those, who are all

agog for the quick consummation, the acceleration of the union with the Lord, cutting short the interval, would surely applaud the Nāyakī's flaming love and ardour. Thus there is scope for condemnation as well as felicitation of the Nāyakī, by the women of the village and those in the neighbouring village, giving rise to the mother's speculation, as above.

mēvi, naintu naintu, viḷaiyāṭaluṟāḷ eṉ ciṟut
tēvi; pōy, iṉit taṉ tirumāl tirukkōḷūril
pū iyal poḷilum, taṭamum, avaṉ kōyilum kaṇṭu,
āvi uḷ kuḷira, eṅṅaṉē ukakkumkol iṉṟē? (VI–7–5)

Translation

My little angelic daughter, in God-head engrossed, has thinned down
And from recreation refrains, she has from here gone
To her Lord unique in Tirukkōḷūr and to her heart's fill,
Enjoy she shall, the orchids fine, the tanks and the temple;
What a pity, watch I can't how indeed she regales!

Note

Even during childhood, the Nāyakī's sole pastime was to sing the holy names of the Lord while her playmates would want to indulge in routine recreation. And now, she has gone to the famous pilgrim centre, Tirukkōḷūr, abounding in lovely scenery, warming up her heart. The manner of her enjoyment will indeed be unique but the mother feels that she is not by the side of her daughter to watch her jubilation.

iṉṟu eṉakku utavātu akaṉṟa iḷamāṉ iṉip pōy,
teṉ ticait tilatam aṉaiya tirukkōḷūrkkē
ceṉṟu, taṉ tirumāl tirukkaṇṇum cevvāyum kaṇṭu,
niṉṟu niṉṟu naiyum-neṭum kaṇkaḷ paṉi malkavē. (VI–7–6)

Translation

My doe-like daughter is unto me of no avail,
She has left me and gone to Tirukkōḷūr, the jewel
Of the South and there she would just dwindle,

Gazing at the Lord's lovely eyes and lips red,
With tears of joy swelling up her eyes broad.

Note

This song is but a follow-up of the preceding song, describing the manner of the Nāyakī's rejoicing, at the other end.

malku nīrk kaṇṇoṭu, maiyal uṟṟa maṉattiṉaḷāy,
allum naṉ pakalum neṭumāl eṉṟu aḻaittu, iṉip pōy,
celvam malki avaṉ kiṭanta tirukkōḷūrkkē
olki olki naṭantu, eṅṅaṉē pukumkol ocintē? (VI–7–7)

Translation

I wonder how my daughter, weak and tired,
With tears brimming the eyes and by deep love fired
For the Lord of her heart, beckoning Him, day and night,
Could trudge her way to Tirukōḷūr, all right.

Note

The mother has now begun to suspect whether her daughter, weighed down by God-love, could have at all trudged along, to Tirukkōḷūr without getting bogged down on the way.

ocinta nuṇ iṭaimēl kaiyai vaittu, nontu nontu,
kacinta neñciṉaḷāy, kaṇṇa nīr tuḷumpac cellumkol-
ocinta oṇ malarāḷ koḻunaṉ tirukkōḷūrkkē
kacinta neñciṉaḷāy, emmai nītta em kārikaiyē? (VI–7–8)

Translation

With a mind, soaked in love, unto Tirukkōḷūr drawn,
Where resides the Spouse of Lakṣmī, the lotus-born,
My pretty daughter has forsaken me and gone;
Holding her waist, thin and emaciated, in great pain,
With tearful eyes, could she have to her destination gone?

Note

The mother thinks that the Nāyakī should have forsaken the former and gone to the Lord at Tirukkōḷūr, to worship the holy conjunction of the Lord and the Divine Mother (Lakṣmī), banking on Her support, sure and sweet. At the same time, the mother also apprehends whether the frail daughter could at all stand the strain of the journey to that place and make it all right.

kāriyam nallaṉakaḷ avai kāṇil, eṉ kaṇṇaṉukku eṉṟu
īriyāy iruppāḷ; itu ellām kiṭakka, iṉip pōy,
cēri pal paḻi tūy iraippa, tirukkōḷūrkkē
nēriḻai naṭantāḷ-emmai oṉṟum niṉaittilaḷē! (VI–7–9)

Translation

My bejewelled daughter with her love-laden heart
Would all things good, unto her Kaṇṇaṉ set aprt;
Leaving all the wealth over here she has set out
Towards Tirukkōḷūr; the folks here will come out
With all sorts of scandals against her but she minds not
All that and unto her we really matter not.

Note

Whereas the worldlings would want all good things for themselves and their sons and daughters, Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī would, in the exuberance of her love for Lord Kṛṣṇa, insist that all good things be earmarked for His use. With such great wealth of God-love in her, where was the need for her to go anywhere else? This is what agitates the mind of the mother; rather, she feels impoverished without the Nāyakī and pines for the latter's attention. As a matter of fact, one's own children become worthy of reverence and worship, when they become God's own. Saint Tirumaṅkai Āḻvār said in Periya Tirumoḻi, VII-2-9, " How can I look upon the (Spiritual) son, who goes to worship the Lord at Tirukaṇṇapuram, as my (bodily) son? ". Indeed, worthiness makes no distinction between father and son, preceptor and disciple. It is said that one Ammuṇiyāḻvār used to prostrate unto his own disciple, being fully conscious of the latter's spiritual greatness, demanding such reverence. One day, the great Nañciyar led his disciple, Nampiḷḷai, to the holy assembly, where the former loudly acclaimed the greatness of the latter.

niṉaikkilēṉ, teyvaṅkāḷ! neṭum kaṇ iḷamāṉ iṉip pōy,
aṉaittu ulakum uṭaiya aravintalōcaṉaṉait
tiṉaittaṉaiyum viṭāḷ; avaṉ cēr tirukkōḷūrkkē
maṉaikku vāṉ paḻiyum niṉaiyāḷ-cella vaittaṉaḷē. (VI–7–10)

Translation

Oh, gods, my broad-eyed daughter, like the doe young, has gone
To the lotus-eyed Lord Supreme, in Tirukkōḷūr, all of a sudden,
With no thought of infamy on her family heaped and gazes
At Him there, all the time, I am indeed in a maze.

Note

Unable to brook separation from her daughter, the mother feels that the Nāyakī has been away from her, for quite a long time. It was indeed high time, she had come back but then the mother visualises the possibility of the Nāyakī getting absorbed in the exquisite charm of the lotus-eyed Lord (Aravintalōcaṉa) standing in front of the Deity, all the time, with no intermission. In such a frame of mind, there was no question of her being worried about what others might say about her abnormal behaviour and how it would affect the reputation of the family, as a whole. The mother addressed the Celestials in the upper regions, as if to enlist their sympathy.

vaitta mā nitiyām matucūtaṉaiyē alaṟṟi,
kottu alar poḻil cūḻ kurukūrc caṭakōpaṉ coṉṉa
pattu nūṟṟuḷ ip pattu avaṉ cēr tirukkōḷūrkkē
cittam vaittu uraippār tikaḻ poṉ—ulaku āḷvārē. (VI–7–11)

Translation

Those that chant these songs ten, with devotion to Tirukkōḷūr,
Out of the thousand composed by Caṭakōpaṉ of Kurukūr,
With flower gardens in fine array all round, in adoration of Matucūtaṉ,
The accumulated Treasure supreme, will over the Eternal Land, reign.

Note

The Lord, as the Treasure supreme, can be freely drawn upon, by one and all, without any fear of extinction, being an inexhaustible fountain of bliss. The chanters of this decad will have none of the difficulties the Āḻvār faced, such as the confrontation between Mother and daughter; on the other hand, they can hold perfect sway over Heaven.

Sixth Centum—Eighth Decad (VI-8)
(Poṉ-ulaku āḷīrō)

Preamble

This is yet another decad, where the Āḻvār sends messages to the Lord through birds, bees etc, the two earlier ones being I-4 and VI-1. This is the third such decad and the fourth and the last decad of this kind is IX-7. The technique, in this regard, having been already elucidated in the preamble to I-4, it would suffice if the distinguishing feature of this decad is brought out, namely, the message is now sent to the Lord in His 'Para' or transcendent and 'Antaryāmi' or hidden Form, as Internal Controller of all, as could be gathered mainly from Stanzas 4 and 5 of this decad. It may be recalled that the messages in I-4 and VI-1 were conveyed to the Lord in His 'Vyuha' and 'Vibhava' aspects, respectively.

The Nāyakī, who set out for the coveted Tirukkōḷūr, couldn't reach the place; as apprehended by her mother, she got bogged down *en route*, due to her intense God-love and, stranded half way through, she sends the messages, as in this decad. The trait of the Lord, invoked by the Nāyakī, is 'compassion' as Piḷḷāṉ would put it, as could also be seen from the oft-repeated rerain of the songs, in this decad. According to Śrī Parāśara Bhaṭṭar, the Lord's feeling of oneness with His devotees (aikarasya), His sense of identity with them, is invoked, vide the sixth stanza.

poṉ-ulaku āḷīrō, puvaṉi muḻutu āḷīrō-
nal nalap puḷḷiṉaṅkāḷ! viṉaiyāṭṭiyēṉ nāṉ irantēṉ;
muṉ ulakkaṅkaḷ ellām paṭaitta mukil vaṇṇaṉ, kaṇṇaṉ,
eṉ nalam koṇṭa pirāṉ-taṉakku, eṉ nilaimai uraittē. (VI–8–1)

Translation

Ye, birds of manners good, this sinner does entreat
That you should unto the cloud-hued Lord, Who did create
The worlds, the Benefactor, Who in me instilled love so great,
Report my condition; I will then unto you grant
The right to rule the entire Earth and Heaven grand.

Notes

(i) Two special points are made out, in this song. No reward is too great for those who mediate between us and God, not even the Earth and Heaven, put together. Therefore it is, aphorism 432 of 'Śrī Vacaṇa Bhūṣaṇa' avers that it would be possible to recompense the Ācāryā, in an adequate measure only if there were four vibhūtis and two Gods. The idea is that any reward, short of both the worlds (the Nitya Vibhūti or the Eternal Land and the Lilā vibhūti or the sportive Universe) and God Himself, will be inadequate and, in order to make a suitable reward, two sets of each would be necessary, an obvious impossibility.

(ii) Again, the Āḷvrā's greatness is such that he has the power to grant to whomsoever he wishes, sovereignty over Earth and Heaven. God's love for the Saints is so great that they are endowed with the Lord's own powers, in this respect. Only a superficial observer, who is just puzzled over the Āḷvār falling at the feet of birds and bees to carry his message to the Lord, will question the Āḷvār's competence, as above. The questioner will do well to realise that the Āḷvār has been deliberately kept on, in this world, by the munificent Lord, so as to bequeath to His devotees, the nectarean hymns to subsist on. The Lord is indeed so pliable unto the Āḷvār that He unreservedly places Himself and all His possessions at his disposal. The messages, such as those featured in this decad, are but facets of the Āḷvār's God-love of matchless intensity.

(iii) Tradition has it that Aruḷāḷapperumāḷ Emperumāṉār (a disciple of Śrī Rāmānuja) made a request to Kūrattaḷvāṉ (an intimate disciple of Rāmānuja) to plead with Lord Raṅganātha to take the former to Heaven. Instances of this kind could easily be multiplied.

mai amar vāḷ neṭum kaṇ maṅkaimār muṉṟu eṉ kai iruntu,
ney amar iṉ aṭicil niccal pāloṭu mēvīrō-
kai amar cakkarattu eṉ kaṉivāyp perumāṉaik kaṇṭu,
mey amar kātal colli, kiḷikāḷ! viraintu ōṭi vantē. (VI–8–2)

Translation

Ye, parrots, meet you should my red-lipped Lord,
Holding the discus and convey my desire to get locked
In His sweet embrace; come back quick and daily take
In my hand perched, porridge sweet, mixed with ghee and milk,
In front of the mates with long, lovely eyes with collyrium treated.

Note

Having offered both Heaven and Earth to her emissaries, in the last song, the Nāyakī now offers to give her very self unto them, a more precious gift, coveted by the Lord Himself and that too, not secretly, but in front of all her mates. It is noteworthy that the Nāyakī indicates beforehand how she would reward her emissaries. The accent thus ultimately rests on service unto the Lord's devotees.

ōṭivantu, eṉ kuḷalmēl oḷi mā malar ūtīrō,
kūṭiya vaṇṭiṉaṅkāḷ! kurunāṭu uṭai aivarkaṭku āy,
āṭiya mā neṭum tērppaṭai nīṟu eḷac ceṟṟa pirāṉ
cūṭiya taṉ-tuḷavam uṇta tū maṭu vāykaḷ koṇṭē. (VI–8–3)

Translation

Ye, jolly swarm of bees, better go and suck the honey
From the cool tuḷaci on the locks of my Lord,
Who to pieces got smashed steeds fine and chariots large
And victory won for the five of them (Pāṇḍavas), come back quickly
And, amid the flowers bright, on my hair make merry.

Note

Here is a case of collective bargaining by a swarm of bees, on behalf of the Nāyakī. And when they come back with

their mouths, soaked in honey from the Lord's locks, they could jolly well play right on the Nāyaki's head and thus indirectly feed her with the Lord's honey.

tū matu vāykaḷ koṇṭuvantu, eṉ mullaikaḷmēl tumpikāḷ!
pū matu uṇṇac cellil, viṉaiyēṉaip poyceytu akaṉṟa
mā matu vār taṇ tuḷāy muṭi vāṉavar-kōṉaik kaṇṭu,
yām ituvō takkavāṟu eṉṉavēṇṭum kaṇṭīr, nuṅkaṭkē. (VI–8–4)

Translation

Ye, beetles sweet, lurking in Jasmine flowers by me reared,
When next in search of honey you go, meet the Lord
Of the Celestials in Heaven, sporting cool tuḷaci garland
On His crown, Who with this sinner freely mingled,
As in a dream and left, and say 'tis hardly meet
That He should unto sovereignty stick and from me depart.

Notes

(i) The beetles, ever in quest of honey, are directed by the Nāyakī to the Lord in Heaven, on whose crown is honey-studded tuḷaci garland, so as to gather the honey therefrom and incidentally tell the Lord that He should not keep aloof from her, at that distance, gloating over His transcendent glory. It is through such mediation by the God's chosen few, His detachment from us is changed into attachment.

(ii) The creatures were languishing without honey, as the flowers on the Nāyakī's locks as well as the surrounding gardens had all dried up, due to her separation from the Lord. And so, the Nāyakī directs them to the Lord in Heaven, sporting tuḷaci garlands, studded with honey.

(iii) Lest the Nāyakī should collapse, if ever she got scent of her impending separation from the Lord, He was telling her, during their erstwhile rapport, that He would never part from her. The Nāyakī takes the blame on herself that it is her sin that made even the truthful Lord utter lies, in this manner, during their erstwhile rapport.

nuṅkaṭku yāṉ uraikkēṉ vammiṉ, yāṉ vaḷartta kiḷikāḷ!
vem kaṇ puḷ-ūrntu vantu, viṉaiyēṉai neñcam kavarnta
ceṅkaṇ-karumukilai, ceyya vāyc celuṅ kaṟpakattai,
eṅkuc ceṉṟākilum kaṇṭu, ituvō takkavāṟu? eṉmiṉē. (VI–8–5)

Translation

Come here, ye, my pet parrots, let me unto you tell,
Be it anywhere, You have to go and meet the cloud-hued Lord,
The lotus-eyed, the wish-yielding tree, unique, mounted on the hot-eyed bird,
Who unto me came and stole this sinner's heart; Him do tell
'Tis not meet that He should from me be apart.

Notes

(i) *Be it anywhere*: Go and ferret Him out, wherever He might be hiding, even as Hanumān solemnly resolved that he shall go to swarga and find out Sītā even if he couldn't locate her in Laṅkā. It is this phrase that gives the clue for the interpretation that this song deals with the 'Antaryāmi' (hidden or all-pervading) aspect of the Lord, as well.

(ii) *Unique wish—yielding tree*: What indeed makes the Lord unique, as distinguished from the legendary 'Kaṟpaka' tree, has been set out admirably in Īṭu commentary; The classical tree can only grant the wish of others; it has no wish of its own nor can it make over itself to others. But the Lord can and does, of His own will, give Himself over to His devotees. The Nāyakī feels that the Lord has gifted away to her both His vibhūtis (the Eternal land and the sportive universe), in such a manner that she could, in turn, gift them away to any one of her choice.

(iii) The hot-eyed bird, referred to, in this song, is Garuḍa who frowns on the ungodly and blisters them with his looks.

eṉ miṉṉu nūl mārvaṉ, eṉ karum perumāṉ, eṉ kaṇṇaṉ,
taṉ maṉṉu nīḷ kaḷalmēl taṉ tuḷay namakku aṉṟi nalkāṉ;
kalmiṉkaḷ eṉṟu ummai yāṉ, kaṟpiyāvaitta māṟṟamcolli,
celmiṉkaḷ-tīviṉaiyēṉ vaḷartta ciṟu pūvaikaḷē! (VI-8-6)

Translation

Ye, little Pūvai birds, by this fell sinner reared,
Go unto my dark-hued Kaṇṇaṉ with shining sacred thread
On His winsome chest which unto me He once gave,
Sweet and docile, He will to none but us give
The cool tuḷaci, decorating His feet long; unto Him recite
The hymns I have taught, remembering them quite *in tact*.

Notes

(i) The little Pūvai birds, commissioned by the Nāyakī to carry her message to the Supreme Lord, were naturally diffident about getting the Lord's attention. The Nāyakī, therefore, enthuses them by saying that the Lord, who had enticed her by His sweet decorations, exquisite Form and amazing simplicity, would surely give unto His devotees, the tuḷaci worn on His feet. As a matter of fact, the sacred basil is worn by the Lord on His shoulders and chest, crown and feet and yet, the devotees specially long for the tuḷaci, worn on the Lord's lovely feet, their safe haven. The Lord, who completely identified Himself with His devotees, would give the tuḷaci on His feet to none but them.

(ii) *This fell Sinner*: The Nāyakī says this, in her state of separation from the Lord, rather feels vexed at that she has to take work from her pets, instead of fondling them in the sweet company of her Lord.

(iii) Our great preceptors have taught the 'Mantra Ratna' (Dvayam) to one and all, without distinction of big and small. Likewise, the Nāyakī has taught even these little birds the truth about the Lord, how He would surely yield the tuḷaci from His feet to the aspiring devotees and that one of such great compassion could ill-afford to be away from the Nāyakī.

(iv) The disciples, who stood reverently at the bed-side of Saint Aruḷāḷapperumāḷ Emperumāṉār towards the fag end of his stay in this abode, found that the Saint was exercising his mind over some thing. On enquiry, they elicited, that he was meditating on how a simple bird (dove) caused grief to Lord Rāma and literally bled His heart. Vibhīṣaṇa's admission to Śrī Rāma's camp was hotly debated, down below, while the supplicant was anxiously poised in mid-air, having entrusted himself to His keeping. The Lord was, however, annoyed over the delay in responding to the destitute's call, caused by such a debate and He affirmed that whosoever sought refuge in Him, be he a friend or foe, was entitled to His protection without demur. Declaring this creed, the Lord also cited the episode which won for a mere dove, deathless praise. Overcoming fear and hatred, the male dove welcomed the slayer of his mate and fed, on his own flesh, the weary fowler. Verily, this episode should have wounded the Lord's heart sorely, when eventually He slew Rāvaṇa, who had kept Sītā in captivity. Nampiḷḷai used to give out the full import of this episode, thus: "Once we confide in the Lord and entrust ourselves to His keeping, as Vibhīṣaṇa did, this simple gesture carries us on to the very acme of spiritual eminence. After our surrender unto God, as the Sole Refuge, He puts through the process of salvation and such is His glory, perfection and grace on which we have but to implicitly rely. We don't have to bend even a blade of grass for our salvation".

pūvaikaḷ pōl niṟattaṉ, puṇṭarīkaṅkaḷ pōlum kaṇṇaṉ,
yāvaiyum yāvarum āy niṉṟa māyaṉ, eṉ āḻip pirāṉ,
māvai val vāy piḷanta matucūtaṟku eṉ māṟṟam colli,
pāvaikaḷ! tīrkkiṟṟirē, viṉaiyāṭṭiyēṉ pācaṟavē? (VI–8–7)

Translation

My dolls, can you my message convey
Unto the wondrous Lord of blue tint and lotus eyes,
Who unto me displayed His lovely discus,

Who the forms of all things and beings acquires,
Who slew Matu and split the mouth of a demoniac horse,
And this sinner's miserable plight allay?

Note

The Nāyakī's plight is such that she is obliged to seek the assistance of even inanimate things like dolls; the Supreme Lord seems to be indifferent while the mobile creatures like the winged birds have their own occupations. In the last resort, she falls back upon her very playthings. The folks around question why at all she should agitate like this, when the Lord is indifferent. The Nāyakī's answer is that she just can't but come under His spell when she meditates on His charming complexion, bewitching eyes, auspicious traits and wondrous deeds.

pācaṟavu eyti, iṉṉē viṉaiyēṉ eṉai ūḻi naivēṉ!
ācu aṟu tūvi veḷḷaik kurukē! aruḷceytu, orunāḷ
mācu aṟu nīlac cuṭar muṭi vāṉavar-kōṉaik kaṇṭu,
ēcu aṟum nummai allāl maṟunōkku ilaḷ-pērttu maṟṟē. (VI–8–8)

Translation

You, immaculate stork with flawless plumes, please spare
A day for me, go and meet the Lord in Heaven
With bluish locks, pure and fine, and of Him enquire
How long this sinner should like this dwindle; tell Him, in fine
Except His impeccable Self, refuge for me there's none.

Note

The Nāyakī prays to the stork, near at hand, to carry her message to the Lord of the Celestials, in Heaven and bursts into grief. She can't articulate and spell out her woes, in detail, as both her grief and the Lord, whose separation is the cause thereof, are too deep for words.

pērttu maṟṟu ōr kaḷaikaṇ viṉaiyāṭṭiyēṉ nāṉ oṉṟu ilēṉ;
nīrt tiraimēl ulavi irai tērum putā iṉaṅkāḷ!
kārt tiraḷ mā mukil pōl kaṇṇaṉ, viṇṇavar-kōṉaik kaṇṭu,
vārttaikaḷ koṇṭu, aruḷi uraiyīr-vaikal vantiruntē. (VI–8–9)

Translation

Ye, herds of herons, wading thro' waves, in search of food,
Other than you, this sinner has none to go and meet the Lord,
Like unto dense rain-clouds, Chief of the Celestials
And bring His message and recount graciously
Unto me, sitting beside me, days on end.

Note

These birds are commissioned by the Nāyakī to go and meet the Lord in Heaven, surrounded by Angels and regaling them (like unto rains, unleashed on the ocean instead of on the crops, withering away) and tell Him, His greatness lay not in His might and majesty in that transcendent setting but in His loving condescension unto the desolate Nāyakī who was dwindling, down below, sunk deep in dejection. And then, these birds were to bring back His message and keep recounting His words to her, sitting by her side, days on end, being the only source of sustenance for her, in the present context.

vantiruntu, ummuṭaiya maṉic cēvalum nīrum ellām,
antaram oṉṟum iṉṟi, alarmēl acaiyum aṉṉaṅkāḷ!
eṉ tiru mārvaṟku eṉṉai iṉṉavāṟu ivaḷ kāṇmiṉ eṉṟu,
mantirattu oṉṟu uṇartti, uraiyīr-maṟumāṟṟaṅkaḷē. (VI–8–10)

Translation

Ye, swans, in front of me, gliding gaily on flowers,
With your lovely males with no hindrance, go and tell
The Lord bearing Tiru on His chest, when alone in His chamber,
How I fare and unto me His reply do come and tell.

Note

The Swans are instructed by the Nāyakī, to disclose her critical condition to the Lord, when He retires to His private chamber, on the conclusion of His Durbar, so that it can catch the attention of 'Tiru', Lakṣmī, the Gracious Mother, the great Intercessor between the Lord and His Subjects. The birds are to bring back the Lord's reply and inform the Nāyakī.

māṟṟaṅkaḷ āyntukoṇṭu, matucūta-pirāṉ aṭimēl
nāṟṟaṅkoḷ pūm poḻil cūḻ kurukūrc caṭakōpaṉ coṉṉa
tōṟṟaṅkaḷ āyirattuḷ ivaiyum orupattum vallār
ūṟṟiṉkaṇ nuṇ maṇal pōl urukāniṟpar nīrāyē. (VI-8-11)

Translation

Those that are conversant with these songs ten,
Out of the thousand composed in choice diction
By Caṭakōpaṉ of Kurukūr, full of fragrant flower gardens,
Adoring Matucūtaṉ's lovely feet, will indeed thaw down
Like unto the sands minute in water springs.

Notes

(i) The end-song usually gives out the tangible (in concrete terms) benefit accrued by dint of learning the songs in this decad. Melting tenderness of heart is indeed a great virtue when one sees that only those with such a disposition can tread the path of Bhakti (God-love) and that is acquired by those who are conversant with this decad. Intangible though it might seem to the superficial reader, it is indeed a priceless possession worth coveting.

(ii) The gardens of Kurukūr are once again, in full bloom, seeing that the Nāyaki herself has derived sustenance from the certain hope that the message conveyed to the Lord in Heaven at His private chamber, will not go unheeded.

Sixth Centum—Ninth Decad (VI-9)
(Nīr āy nilaṉ āy)

Preamble

The Lord did not present Himself before the Āḻvār in spite of the errands run by his emissaries, as in the last decad. The Āḻvār, therefore, decided to raise his own clarion call of deep yearning, reaching the very Heavens, with robst faith in the fruition of his full-throated call for deliverance. It would indeed be well-nigh impossible for the Lord to stay in Heaven, once the Āḻvār's voice is heard by Him, over there.

nīr āy, nilaṉ āy, tī āy, kāl āy, neṭu vāṉ āy,
cīr ār cuṭarkaḷ iraṇṭu āy, civaṉ āy, ayaṉ āṉāy!
kūr ār āḻi veṇ caṅku ēnti, koṭiyēṉpāl
vārāy orunāḷ-maṇṇum viṇṇum makiḻavē. (VI-9-1)

Translation

Oh, Lord, You pervade the elements, one and all,
The Sun, the Moon, Civaṉ and Ayaṉ, as Internal Controller of them all;
Please appear before this sinner, for a day at least, holding the discus sharp
And the white conch so that Heaven and Earth do rejoice.

Note

The Āḻvār could certainly cognise the Universal Form of the Lord, in the created world of multifarious things and creatures, even as Prahlāda did. There was obviously no need, in that case, for him to send emissaries to the Lord, here and there, as he has been doing. And now, the Āḻvār clarifies his stand; he pines for the Lord's extraordinary Form of exquisite charm, wielding the sharp discus and the white conch, the Lord's 'Divya maṅgala vigraha', the Supernal Form. It is for beholding this enthralling Form of the Lord, even if it be but once, that the Āḻvār is pouring out his heart. Did not Arjuna insist, after beholding the Lord's Viśvarūpa' (the breath taking Cosmic Form of formidable dimensions) that He be seen as the lovely Kṛṣṇa, as before, with just four arms, as against the thousands shown to him?

maṇṇum viṇṇum makiḻa, kuṟaḷ āy, valam kāṭṭi,
maṇṇum viṇṇum koṇṭa māya ammāṉē!
naṇṇi uṉai nāṉ kaṇṭu, ukantu, kūttāṭa,
naṇṇi, orunāḷ ñālattūṭē naṭavāyē. (VI-9-2)

Translation

Oh, wondrous Lord, as the midget (Vāmana), your bewitching Form,
The whole Universe did enjoy, you did (from Bali) take

All the worlds; for a day at least, do unto this land come,
So that I dance around, under the magic spell of your walk.

Note

Unto the Āḻvār who invited the Lord to come down here and exhibit His superb Form, the Lord would appear to have told that He would rather comply with the Āḻvār's request after lifting him up to Heaven, in due course. But the Āḻvār insists that He, who displayed His exquisite Form to Asuras like Mahā Bali, shouldn't hesitate to respond to his (Āḻvār's) devout call and regale him, right here.

ñālattūṭē naṭantum, niṉṟum, kiṭantu, iruntum,
cālap pala nāḷ ukamtōṟu, uyirkaḷ kāppāṉē!
kōlat tiru mā makaḷōṭu uṉṉaik kūṭātē,
cālap pala nāḷ, aṭiyēṉ iṉṉum taḷarvēṉō? (VI–9–3)

Translation

Oh, Lord, in every age You did on Earth incarnate
And succour Your subjects for thousands of years,
Assuming postures many; Still, should I for long be apart
From you and Your consort Divine and languish, right here?

Note

The Āḻvār rightly questions the Lord who incarnated, in many ways and on many occasions, to succour His devotees, whether He cannot incarnate once more, for his sake. As, Śrī Rāma, the Lord walked through the depopulated forests where very few could enjoy His entrancing gait. And now, why should He not walk in front of the Āḻvār, yearning to behold His majestic gait, at least once in a way?

taḷaratum muṟintum, cakaṭa acurar uṭal vēṟāp
piḷantu vīya, tiruk kāl āṇṭa perumāṉē!
kiḷarntu piramaṉ, civaṉ, intiraṉ, viṇṇavar cūḻa,
viḷaṅka, orunāḷ kāṇa vārāy-viṇmītē. (VI–9–4)

Translation

Oh, Lord, Your mighty feet dashed to pieces
The demon in the cart-wheel; appear at least once

Up in the sky along with Piramaṉ, Civaṉ and other Devas
So that I may enjoy the sight of your grand galaxy.

Note

The Lord's feet afford protection not only to us all, His subjects, but to the Lord, as well. Baby Kṛṣṇa was fast asleep in the cart, an improvised cradle, when a demon entered the cart-wheel. The Babe cried for milk and the legs kicked violently against the wheel, shattering the demon to pieces. Therefore it is, the text in this song (original) contains a phrase (Tirukkālāṇṭa Perumāṉ) which denotes that the Lord got many a thing accomplished through His feet. It should indeed not be difficult for the Lord to concede the Āḻvar's request, as impediments, if any, could easily be overcome by the Lord's feet.

viṇmītu iruppāy! malaimēl niṟpāy! kaṭal cēṟppāy!
maṇmītu uḻalvāy! ivaṟṟuḷ eṅkum maṟaintu uṟaivāy!
eṇ mītu iyaṉṟa puṟa aṇṭattāy! eṉatu āvi-
uḷmītu āṭi, uruk kāṭṭātē oḷippāyō? (VI–9–5)

Translation

Oh, Lord, (in Your transcendent glory) You stay in High Heaven,
Stand do You in Mount (Tiruvēṅkaṭaṁ, in Your Iconic Form),
You recline on the Milk-ocean and on Earth You'd roam
(In Your Incarnate Forms); invisible You'd remain
Inside all things and beings, innumerable are the regions far beyond,
Which You pervade; should you hide yourself after stimulating my mind?

Notes

(i) The five different manifestations of the Lord, namely, 'Para', 'Vyūha', 'Vibhava', 'Antaryāmi' and 'Arca' are set out here. The 'Vyūha' denotes the Lord's seat of creative activity, namely, the Milk-ocean; all the other aspects have been indicated in the verse itself, within brackets.

(ii) The Āḷvār longs for the external perception of the Lord inside, in His 'Divya Maṅgala Vigraha' (exclusive Form of exquisite charm).

pāy ōr aṭi vaittu, ataṉ kīḻp paravai nilam ellām
tāy, ōr aṭiyāl ellā ulakum taṭavanta
māyōṉ! uṉṉaik kaṇpāṉ varunti, eṉaiṉāḷum
tīyōṭu uṭaṉcēr meḻukāy, ulakil tirivēṉō? (VI–9–6)

Translation

My wondrous Lord, encompass You did, in just one pace,
The entire land by oceans surrounded and by another
Pervaded all the regions above; in vain do I bother
To behold You, how long more should I in this world suffer
Like wax close to fire ere we come face to face?

Note

There was a time when the Lord was after the Āḷvār, trying to reclaim the errant soul, straying away from Him and eluding His grasp. But now, it is the other way round; the Āḷvār is madly after the Lord, Who is eluding him. The Āḷvār's plight is like that of the wax close to fire, as distinguished from wax actually placed on fire, neither dead nor alive, in the true sense.

ulakil tiriyum karuma kati āy, ulakam āy,
ulakukkē ōr uyirum āṉāy! puṟa aṇṭattu
alakil polinta ticai pattu āya aruvēyō!
alakil polinta aṟivilēṉukku aruḷāyē. (VI–9–7)

Translation

My Lord, You are the Super-Soul of both the visible and the invisible,
The acts and the performers in all the worlds besides the souls innumerable
In the regions afar, the released souls whose knowledge permeates
Ten directions; shed unto me, with failings innumerable, Your sweet grace.

Notes

The sentient beings (intelligent souls, embodied) and the non-sentient matter, which constitute the worlds, form the body of God and they are inseparably related to Him, as attributes are to a substance, body to the soul.

Whosoever performs acts as the means for securing certain objectives, owes the very performance of those acts to the Lord who endowed them with body and limbs but for which they can't function in the manner they are doing. And then, the reward due, in respect of such performance, is also made by Him.

aṟivilēṉukku aruḷāy, aṟivār uyir āṉāy!
veṟi koḷ cōti mūrtti! aṭiyeṉ neṭumālē!
kiṟiceytu, eṉṉaip puṟattiṭṭu, iṉṉam keṭuppāyō-
piṟitu oṉṟu aṟiyā aṭiyēṉ āvi tikaikkavē? (VI–9–8)

Translation

Oh, Lord, in the gnostics your very Soul You find,
Your Form resplendent is full of fragrance, unto me You bear
Inordinate love, Your grace on this ignoramus please do confer,
I look upon You as my Sole Refuge, pray do not confound;
To put me astray thro' some mischief, do You still intend?

Note

In the preceding song, the Āḷvār invoked the Lord's grace and yet, the Lord did not condescend to come unto him. The Āḷvār grows sceptical about the Lord's intentions whether He still tries to confound him and unsettle his firm conviction that the Lord's lovely feet constitute his sole Refuge, making him slip back to his old ways.

āvi tikaikka, aivar kumaikkum ciṟṟiṉpam
pāviyēṉaip pala nī kāṭṭip paṭuppāyō?
tāvi vaiyam koṇṭa taṭam tāmaraikaṭkē
kūvik koḷḷum kālam iṉṉam kuṟukātō? (VI–9–9)

Translation

My Lord, won't you cut out the interval and in Heaven bind
Me unto Your lotus feet large which spanned the worlds
Or do You intend to finish this sinner off and confound my
mind,
Keeping me unto petty pleasures of the senses five exposed?

Notes

(i) The Āḷvār prays unto the Lord that He need no longer persevere in the dangerous experiment of keeping him in this land of nescience, where the senses have free play. Nampiḷḷai, in his unique diction, would put it, as a preamble to this song, the Āḷvār telling the Lord, " You ask me what mischief You have played unto me; let me tell You that Your exposing me to the vagaries of the senses is the farthest limit up to which Your mischief can go. I very well knew, the day You put me in this harrowing world, You actually buried me alive and put spadefuls of earth on top ".

(ii) When Nañciyar was at the bed side of ailing Tirukkurukaippirāṉ Piḷḷāṉ (one of the commentators of Tiruvāymoḷi), the latter was heard repeating the last line of this song (as in the original text), " Will not the final call from Heaven come quick?". Nañciyar started sobbing, on hearing this, pained by the thought of the master passing away from their midst. The illustrious Piḷḷāṉ, however, called the Cīyar to order, asking him, " What indeed moves you thus, to tears? Do you really think that the Heavenly bliss is inferior to our sojourn here? "

kuṟukā, nīḷā, iṟutikūṭā eṉai ūḻi
ciṟukā, perukā, aḷavu il iṉpam cērntālum,
maṟu kāl iṉṟi, māyōṉ! uṉakkē āḷākum
ciṟu kālattai uṟumō antō! teriyilē? (VI–9–10)

Translation

Oh, wondrous Lord, the so-called bliss, in disembodied state
On final emancipation, is no doubt eternal and changeless at
any time,

But, alas! can it ever match the bliss of service at Your feet
Even if it be but once and that, only for a short time?

Note

Reference to the petty pleasures, prompted by the five senses, was made by the Āḷvār in the last song. This would appear to have raised a doubt in the Lord's mind whether or not the Āḷvār eschewed the ' Kaivalya Mokṣa ', which was everlasting, undergoing no modification, at any time. The Āḷvār, therefore, hastens to clarify his stand in this regard, as well. The so-called bliss of enjoying one's own self endlessly, in the disembodied state, is hardly worth a day's purchase. It cannot stand any comparison with the bliss of rendering service at the Lord's feet, even if it be for a short while.

terital, niṉaital, eṇṇal ākāt tirumālukku
uriya toṇṭar toṇṭar toṇṭaṉ caṭakōpaṉ
teriyac coṉṉa ōr āyirattuḷ ip pattum
uriya toṇṭar ākkum, ulakam uṇṭāṟkē. (VI–9–11)

Translation

Those that learn these songs ten
Out of the profound thousand, composed by Caṭakōpaṉ,
The vassal of the vassals' vassals, the eternal Servants
Of Tirumāl Whom mere learning or contemplation
Or meditation cannot gauge, will become the exclusive servants
Of the Lord Supreme, Who did all the worlds gulp down.

Note

The Lord is, no doubt, to be realised through learning, contemplation and meditation but all these, by themselves, will be of no avail, unless accompanied by deep love for Him. The Āḷvār plunges himself down to the bottom-most depth of service, like unto the extremely thirsty diving into the deep pocket of water in the river bed. This is the only way by which he could ward off the postures of the worldlings on

the one hand, and the intensity of his longing for communion with the Lord, on the other. In this very vein, the Āḷvār spells out the benefit accruing from the recital of the songs in this decad, namely, getting absorbed in the intimate service of the Supreme Lord.

Sixth Centum—Tenth Decad (VI-10)
(Ulakam uṇṭa Peruvāyā)

Preamble

In the last decad, the Āḷvār voiced forth, in deep anguish, his inordinate longing for communion with the Lord, so as to be audible to Him, right in Heaven. And yet, there has been no response from the Lord and the Āḷvār is, therefore, in a state of extreme mental distress and physical debility. He is, however, quick to realise that the Lord stands enshrined in holy Tiruvēṅkaṭam (Andhra Pradesh), the common meeting ground of the 'Nitya Sūris' (Eternal Heroes in Heaven), the 'Nitya Samsāris' (worldlings), birds and beasts. At this holy centre, the Āḷvār seeks refuge at the feet of the Lord through the good offices of the Divine Mother, inseparably poised on His winsome chest, voicing forth his sole dependence on Him. In the first nine songs of this decad, the Āḷvār dwells upon the glory and grandeur of the Lord, the Great Saviour, and, in the tenth, he surrenders at His feet, the Sole Refuge. No doubt, the Āḷvār had surrendered himself earlier also at the feet of the Lord, enshrined in other Pilgrim centres, c.f. IV-9, V-7 and V-8, but there is as much difference between those and the one currently resorted to, as between 'Tirumantram' and 'Dvayam'. While the holy conjunction of Mahālakṣmī, the Divine Mother and the Lord is but implicit in the former, it is explicit in the latter, as in this decad, vide tenth song.

ulakam uṇṭa peruvāyā! ulappu il kīrtti ammāṉē!
nilavum cuṭar cūḻ oḷi mūrtti! neṭiyāy! aṭiyēṉ ār uyirē!
tilatam ulakukku āy niṉṟa tiruvēṅkaṭattu em perumāṉē!
kula tol aṭiyēṉ uṉa pātam kūṭum āṟu kūṟāyē. (VI–10–1)

Translation

My Lord at Tiruvēṅkaṭam, the bright vermilion mark on Cosmos' face!
With Your mammoth mouth You gulped down the whole Universe
And thus retrieving it, gained peerless fame;
Of supernal form resplendent, Thou art Supreme,
Dearest unto me, Your humble vassal from generations,
To attain Your feet, Your grace I invoke with veneration.

Notes

(i) The Āḷvār prays that he should be enabled to enjoy the beatific bliss, in close proximity to the Lord at Tiruvēṅkaṭam. The Āḷvār's grief, in not being able to get at the Lord's feet, calls for the same attention on His part, as the great deluge when He did sustain all the worlds, with their contents, inside His stomach. All that fame, He derived by that great gesture, will be totally nullified in case He didn't relieve the Āḷvār's distress.

(ii) The great Saviour is indeed large-mouthed, as the Āḷvār puts it. Pledged to protect the supplicants who seek refuge in Him, He goes the whole hog out and still does not feel satisfied that He has done enough for them, as in the case of Draupati-*an insatiable hunger for protecting those who seek protection.* At His bidding, enemies turn friends. A serpent, named Sumukha, sought Lord Kṛṣṇa's refuge and protection against the fearful raids of Garuḍa, the tribal enemy of the serpent race. The Lord vouchsafed protection to Sumukha, invited Garuḍa and consigned the former to the latter's care. Garuḍa, the inveterate enemy, had thus to lay aside his racial enmity and befriend Sumukhā; the erstwhile oppressor becomes the protector, oh, how potent is the Lord's will!

kūṟu āy, nīṟu āy, nilaṉ āki, koṭu val acurar kulam ellām
cīṟā eriyum tiru nēmi valavā! teyvak kōmāṉē!
cēṟu ār cuṉait tāmarai centī malarum tiruvēṅkaṭattāṉē!
āṟā aṉpil aṭiyēṉ uṉ aṭicēr vaṇṇam aruḷāyē. (VI–10–2)

Translation

Oh, Supreme Lord, residing in Tiruvēṅkaṭam in whose cloddy ponds
The lotus blossoms fiery red and holding in Your right hand,
The hissing discus effulgent, which cut, burnt and razed to the ground
Hordes of monstrous Rākṣasas, pray shed Your grace sweet
Unto me of limitless love, to enable me to attain Your feet.

Notes

(i) The Āḷvār prays unto the Lord holding the discus, the great destroyer of all enemies, to destroy his enemies also and take him unto His lovely feet, so that His stay on mount Tiruvēṅkaṭam could indeed be fruitful.

(ii) The Āḷvār's God-love is an inexhaustible fountain which won't dry up even if the ponds in Tiruvēṅkaṭam went dry; that is because all that knowledge, which blossomed into intellectual love of God, was dowered on him by the Lord Himself. (I–I–1).

vaṇṇam maruḷ koḷ aṇi mēkavaṇṇā! māya ammāṉē!
eṉṉam pukuntu tittikkum amutē! imaiyōr atipatiyē!
teḷ nal aruvi maṇi poṉ muttu alaikkum tiruvēṅkaṭattāṉē!
aṇṇalē! uṉ aṭi cēra, aṭiyēṟku āā! eṉṉāyē. (VI–10–3)

Translation

Oh, Lord of Celestials, beaming in Tiruvēṅkaṭam, whose cascades clear and lovely,
Bring in rubies, gold and pearls in plenty,
Of wondrous traits, my cloud-hued Sire! grace personified You are,
My heart you do sweeten as you enter,
Take pity on me and let me your feet attain, my Master!

Note

The Lord at Tiruvēṅkaṭam is the very embodiment of grace; He, who imparted unalloyed knowledge to the Āḷvār, resulting in his single-minded devotion to the Lord, should also help him to attain His feet. This is the humble submission of the Āḷvār.

āā! eṉṉātu ulakattai alaikkum acurar vāḷ-nāḷmēl
tī vāy vāḷi maḻai poḻinta cilaiyā! tiru mā makaḷ keḷvā!
tēvā! curarkaḷ, muṉikkaṇaṅkaḷ virumpum tiruvēṅkaṭattāṉē!
pū ār kalalkāḷ aruviṉaiyēṉ poruntumāṟu puṇarāyē. (VI–10–4)

Translation

Oh, Tirumāmakaḷ's Spouse Divine, residing in Tiruvēṅkaṭam,
Adored by sages and Celestials, in strength, arrows spitting fire,
You, great Archer, did on the unrelenting Acurar shower,
Teach this sinner dire how to attain Your florid feet, my Sanctum.

Notes

(i) The Āḷvār tells the Lord that none of the means, outlined in the Śāstrās for attaining His feet, has been of any avail to him and that He should, therefore, teach him yet another way, implying thereby that, for him, the Lord should at once be the 'Means' and the 'End', the path and the goal.

A disciple of Nañciyar caused him great mental pain by questioning the need for the act of Surrender to God (plainly indicative of something done, out of one's own free will), if God is our only Means of salvation and there is nothing for us to do. It is a pity, the questioner did not receive the sacred truth of 'Prapatti', resignation to God, in good faith and failed to appreciate the spirit underlying it, namely, our free-will inclining to God's grace is itself due to His grace. Nañciyar regretted very much that he should have passed on to the questioner (not truly responsive) this sacred truth, handed down, as a holy legacy, through an unbroken succession of preceptors. Smiting his palm against his forehead, he retired to his private chamber, moved with pity and sorrow at the obduracy of

men's hearts in not receiving and understanding such sacred truths, in their proper perspective.

(ii) *Unrelenting Acurar*: The Asuras are the ungodly, who inflict miseries on their fellow-beings. The great Nañciyar taught his disciples to distinguish the Godly from the otherwise, as follows: We may console ourselves as related to God, if our hearts are moved with compassion when any ill befalls others; if, on the other hand, we gloat over others' miseries, surely, we are cast away from Him.

puṉarā niṉṟa maram ēḻ aṉṟu eyta oru vil valavā! ō!
puṉar ēy niṉṟa maram iraṇṭiṉ naṭuvē pōṉa mutalvā! ō!
tiṉar ār mēkam eṉak kaḷiṟu cērum tiruvēṅkaṭattāṉē!
tiṉar ārcārṅkattu uṉa pātam cērvatu aṭiyēṉ, ennāḷē? (VI–10–5)

Translation

Thou art the unique Archer, Whose shaft once sped
Thro' the *Sal* trees seven huddled together,
The Primate Who 'twixt the twin (*Maruta*) trees crawled,
And art now in Tiruvēṅkaṭam where elephants do gather,
Akin to dense clouds; My Lord, wielding the bow mighty,
When shall this vassal reach Thy feet doughty?

Notes

(i) The Lord would appear to have told the Āḻvār that He was surely taking him to His abode in Heaven; the expectant Āḻvār is, however, not satisfied with a general assurance of this kind and insists that a date be set for the consummation.

(ii) It can be both ways, namely, elephants gathering like clouds and clouds gathering like elephants, in that holy mountain. The Lord, enshrined there, is Himself referred to, as the cloud adorning the crest of Veṅkaṭādri (Mount Tiruvēṅkaṭam)—"Śri Veṅkaṭādri śikharālaya Kāḷamekhaṁ". Saint Tirumaṅkai Āḻvār also refers to the Lord at Tiruvēṅkaṭam as the Elephant, adorning the North.

(iii) The mighty bow in the Lord's hand is quite reassuring and the Āḻvār is, therefore, sanguine of attaining to His feet. All that He wants now is that the Lord should graciously specify the point of time at which he would be lifted up.

ennāḷē nām maṇ aḷanta iṇait tāmaraikaḷ kāṇpataṟku eṉṟu,
ennāḷum niṉṟu imaiyōrkaḷ ētti, iṟaiñci iṉam iṉamāy
meyn nā maṉattāl vaḻipāṭu ceyyum tiruveṅkaṭattāṉē!
meyn nāṉ eytī, en nāḷ uṉ aṭikkaṇ aṭiyēṉ mēvuvatē? (VI–10–6)

Translation

Enshrined in Tiruvēṅkaṭam where do wait reverently, days on end,
Groups of Celestials, to worship Your lotus feet, the pair that spanned
The Universe, and meditate on You by word, deed and thought,
Oh, Lord! when shall this vassal, in reality, attain Your feet?

Note

There was indeed no need for the Lord to set a date for His union with the Āḻvār, as desired by him, in the preceding song; he could very well enjoy that bliss, right here, at Tiruvēṅkaṭam, where even 'Nitya Sūris' come down from Heaven and worship. And so, he would not like to miss that bliss, near at hand.

aṭiyēṉ mēvi amarkiṉṟa amutē! imaiyōr atipatiyē!
koṭiyā aṭu puḷ uṭaiyāṉē! kōlak kaṉivāyp perumāṉē!
ceṭi ār viṉaikaḷ tīr maruntē! tiruvēṅkaṭattu em perumāṉē!
noṭi ār poḻutum uṉa pātam kāṇa nōlātu, āṟṟēṉē! (VI–10–7)

Translation

You are the Nectar, by this vassal enjoyed, Oh, Lord of Celestials,
On Your banner is Garuḍa Who the enemies burns out, for dense ills
You are the panacea, Oh, Lord at Tiruvēṅkaṭam, Your lips attractive

Like unto lovely fruit. I am eager to behold; I am indeed restive,
Brooking no delay, not a trice, in worshipping Your feet,
Although I have to my credit no special rite.

Notes

(i) It is the insatiable Nectar, deeply imbedded in the mind of the Āḻvār, that he hastens to behold physically. All this flutter, on his part, is not because of any misgiving regarding the attainment of the goal but because of his inability to brook the delay in getting at it, overwhelmed by its grandeur.

(ii) '*The Nectar by this vassal enjoyed*', is yet another addition to the long list of the Lord's holy names, similar to the one coined by the Āḻvār earlier, '*The One in me mingled*', vide II-5-2. The Nectar, enjoyed by the Āḻvār, is indeed far superior to the one said to have been enjoyed by the Devas, a mere salt extract, in comparison to the current enjoyment of the Āḻvār, and, for the matter of that, the Āḻvār's manner of enjoyment is unique, by-no-means comparable with that of others.

(iii) This song (as per the text in the original) is being chanted by the devout while making offerings of dishes to the Lord, as part of worship, as ordained by Śrī Parāśara Bhaṭṭar.

nōlātu āṟṟēṉ uṉa pātam kāṇa eṉṟu, nuṉ uṇarviṉ
nīl ār kaṇṭattu ammāṉum, niṟai nāṉmukaṉum, intiraṉum-
cēl ēy kaṇṇār palar cūḻa-virumpum tiruvēṅkaṭattāṉē!
mālāy mayakki, aṭiyēṉpāl vantāy pōlē vārāyē. (VI–10–8)

Translation

My Lord, dwelling in Tiruvēṅkaṭam, unto you do resort
The revered blue-necked Sire (Śivā) of intelligence acute,
Nāṉmukaṉ, of knowledge consummate, and Intiraṉ, saying that inadequate
Is their equipment to worship Your feet and with their consorts

Of bewitching looks, they eagerly serve You; pray do appear
Before this dependant, as did the entrancing Kaṇṇaṉ before His parents dear.

Note

Apprehending the possibility of the Lord keeping aloof, in view of the inadequacy, rather, absence of any equipment, worth the name, in the Āḻvār, referred to by him already, in the preceding song, he now claims parity, in this regard, with those in the higher echelons. Even the Celestials, at the top, suffer from inadequacy in this respect, despite their massive learning, acute intellect and great prowess. Still, they do come down to Tiruvēṅkaṭam, along with their consorts, to serve the Lord, with great zeal.

vantāy pōlē vārātāy! vārātāy pōl varuvāṉē!
centāmaraik kaṇ, ceṅkaṉi vāy, nāl tōḷ amutē! eṉatu uyirē!
cintāmaṇikaḷ pakar allaip pakal cey tiruvēṅkaṭattāṉē!
antō! aṭiyēṉ uṉa pātam akalakillēṉ, iṟaiyumē. (VI–10–9)

Translation

Oh, Lord at Tiruvēṅkaṭam, where gems of unique sheen
Make the night shine like day, You are seemingly near, yet far,
But when (in despair), You seem afar, You draw near;
With lotus eyes red, lips like ripe fruit, Your Form nectarean,
With shoulders four, is unto me dearest; from Your feet,
Alas! this humble lover cannot, for a moment, be apart.

Notes

(i) The gems could refer either to those in the sacred Mount or those embedded in the Jewels on the Lord's person.

(ii) The Āḻvār's mental vision of the Lord was so full and complete that he could easily mistake it for physical perception, in three dimensions; when, out of deep yearning, he held out his arms for embracing the Lord, he would be disillusioned, rather extremely disappointed. Again, at a time, when the Āḻvār would not have the faintest hope of enjoying the Lord's vision, the Lord

would suddenly present Himself before his mind's eye. As a matter of fact, we have witnessed such fluctuations and vicissitudes, all along.

akalakillēṉ iṟaiyum eṉṟu alarmēl maṅkai uṟai mārpā!
nikar il pukaḻāy! ulakam mūṉṟu uṭaiyāy! eṉṉai āḷvāṉē!
nikar il amarar, muṉikkaṇaṅkaḷ virumpum tiruvēṅkaṭattāṉē!
pukal oṉṟu illā aṭiyēṉ uṉ aṭikkīḻ amarntu pukuntēṉē.
(VI–10–10)

Translation

Oh, Resident of Tiruvēṅkaṭam, reverently sought by the peerless Amarars
And sages in their bunches, on Your winsome chest inheres
The Divine Mother who from a flower emerged, ever saying that
From You she shall not for a moment be apart;
Of incomparable glory, You are the Lord of all the three worlds,
And at Your feet lovely, this vassal squarely takes refuge, with no other hold.

Notes

(i) In the preceding nine songs, the Āḻvār described the Lord's greatness and grandeur and also gave vent to his deep yearning to get at Him. And now, he takes refuge at the Lord's feet, seeking the good offices of the Divine Mother, ever present on the Lord's chest, so as to accelerate his union with the Lord. While doing so, he gives expression to his abject destitution and exclusive dependence on the Lord. It has to be noted that the Āḻvār is still seated in lotus pose, inside the hollow of the tamarined tree at Tirunakari. Of the three types of 'Prapatti', surrender to the Lord's loving grace, by word, deed or thought, this one falls under the first category, 'vācika' (Añjali, paramā mudrā kṣipraṁ Devaprasādinī).

(ii) The Divine Mother, Lakṣmī, the lotus-born, is inseparably poised on the Lord's chest and yet, why should she keep uttering the words, "From you, I shall not, for a moment, be apart"? As the saying goes, "A thing is too good to last long". No wonder, in the exuberance of her enjoyment of the Lord's nectarean person, the Mother is, side by side, haunted by the fear of getting dislodged from this exhilarating milieu and hence, her constant submission, as above.

aṭikkīḻ amarntu pukuntu, aṭiyīr, vāḻmiṉ eṉṟu eṉṟu aruḷ koṭukkum
paṭik kēḻ illāp perumānaip palaṉak kurukūrc caṭakōpaṉ
muṭippāṉ coṉṉa āyirattut tiruvēṅkaṭattukku ivai pattum
piṭittār piṭittār vīṟṟiruntu periya vāṉuḷ nilāvuvarē. (VI–10–11)

Translation

Those that recite or listen to these songs ten,
Which unto holy Tiruvēṅkaṭam pertain,
Out of the thousand sung by Kurukūr Caṭakōpaṉ
To cut out worldly ties, in sweet adoration
Of the peerless Lord, Who His feet exhibits for ever,
Exhorting the devotees to take refuge therein,
Will in High Heaven for ever remain.

Notes

(i) The thousand songs were sung by Saint Nammāḻvār, stung by the severe fright of the worldly distractions and the mischief of the unruly senses, in order to cut out the worldly ties, vide also VI-9-9.

(ii) These ten songs are made over to Tiruvēṅkaṭam, out of the thousand, meant, as a whole, to adore Lord Raṅganātha, enshrined in the walled city of Śrīraṅgam.

(iii) The Lord at Tiruvēṅkaṭam stands in a unique pose, His right hand pointing to the dazzling feet below, to show that there and there alone lies our salvation. It is worth recalling, in this context, sloka 110 of the first centum, in Śrī Parāśara Bhaṭṭar's Śrī Raṅgarāja Stavam, "Kirīṭaṁ Śrī Raṅge śayithuḥ......................"
It is said that, in His reclining posture, Lord Raṅganātha

is touching the crown on His head with one hand, while the other hand, stretching down to His knee, points to His lotus feet; the former proclaims His overlordship, the supreme sovereignty over Brahmā, Śiva and all else, while the latter reveals His easy accessibility, offering His lotus feet, as the sole Refuge of His devotees.

THE CENTUM IN RETROSPECT (DECAD—WISE SUMMARY)

(VI-1): *In the opening decad of this centum,* the Lord seeks out the Lord, in His worshippable Form at Tiruvaṇvaṇṭūr (in Kerala State). Being too feeble to reach that place, the Āḷvār, once again transformed as the Nāyakī, in a forlorn state, sends some birds and bees to convey her message to the Lord, in His Incarnate Form (a gathered from the tenth song of this decad), invoking His pledge to extend protection to His devotees;

(This is the second of the four decads in the whole work, where the Āḷvār (*transformed as Nāyakī*) sends emissaries to the Lord at various destinations, to convey her message to Him; the earlier one is I-4 and the later ones are VI-8 and IX-7).

(VI-2) : In response to the message sent, as in the opening decad, the Lord eventually presents Himself before the Nāyaki who is, however, seen, *in the second decad,* resenting His delayed appearance. With the characteristic feminine jealousy and rancour, the Nāyakī arraigns the Lord for having apparently strayed elsewhere, making love to the damsels of His special preference, and asks Him to go back to them. This is virtually a re-enactment of Kṛṣṇa-Gopis episode of Śrīmad Bhāgavatam; the rancour of the overzealous Gopis would obviously not last long, being but an interim facet of connubial relationship, culminating in the reunion of the all-conquering Lover and His beloveds;

(VI-3) : The Saint keeps musing over the superior might of the Lord, in having got him round, despite his stout resolve not to have anything to do with that malingering defaulter, any more. The Lord reveals to the Āḷvār His extraordinary capacity for achieving the impossible and reconciling the incompatibles besides the glorious Iconic Form in which He stays in Tiruviṇṇakar (in Tamil Nadu, near Tirukkuṭantai, already covered in V-8). The Āḷvār recounts his current experience, *in the third decad;*

(VI-4) : His erstwhile emotional break-down and exhaustion having yielded place to exhilaration, we see the Āḷvār recounting, *in the fourth decad,* the Lord's glorious deeds and activities besides giving vent to his extraordinary joy, resulting from such recital *cum* contemplation. The Āḷvār concludes

each song, in this decad, by showering on himself praises like " There is none equal to me in all the land ", " There is none above me " etc., expressions of an ecstatic mind, dissolved in God-love;

(VI-5) : *In the fifth decad,* the Nāyakī's (Āḷvār's) mates tell the elderly women around about the profusion of the Nāyakī's love unto the Lord, enshrined in Tolaivillimaṅkalam (deep south in Tamil Nadu). The mates keep guessing whether the Nāyakī could be but Nappiṉṉai (Lord Kṛṣṇa's favourite Consort) reborn or an Incarnation of Mother Earth, full of grace or Mahālakṣmī Herself;

(VI-6) : The gnostic mother speaks out, *in the sixth decad,* the desperate condition of her love-lorn daughter (Āḷvār); the manner in which the latter is dwindling down, losing, one by one, her feminine charms and embellishments. As the Nāyakī meditates on the wondrous deeds performed by the Lord in each of His various incarnations and the special traits, then exhibited by Him, she goes into raptures and her body thaws down and dwindles;

(VI-7) : The mother continues her narration—*in the seventh decad* also, voicing forth the Nāyakī's extraordinary devotion to the Lord at Tirukkōḷūr (a pilgrim centre, also deep south, in Tamil Nadu), her inordinate longing for incessant communion with Him;

(VI-8) : The Nāyakī, who set out for the coveted Tirukkōḷūr, could not reach the place, bogged down, *en route,* due to her intense God-love; stranded half-way through, she sends messages through birds etc., *as in the eighth decad,* to the Lord in His ' Para ' (transcendent) and ' Antaryāmi ' (hidden form as Internal Controller of all beings), invoking His trait of ' aikarasya ' (feeling of oneness with His devotees);

(This is the third decad of this pattern, the earlier ones being I-4 and VI-1; one more, namely, IX-7 will follow).

(VI-9) : His errands, as in the eighth decad, not having evoked the desired response, the Āḷvār raises, *in the ninth decad,* his own clarion call of deep yearning, reaching the very heaven, with robust faith in the fruition of his full-throated call for deliverance;

(VI-10) : In the ninth decad, the Āḷvār voiced forth, in deep anguish, his inordinate longing for communion with the Lord, so as to be audible to Him, right in the high Heaven. And yet, there has been no response from the Lord, reducing the Āḷvār to a state of extreme mental distress and physical debility. He is, however, quick to realise that the Lord stays, in His worshippable Form, in holy Tiruvēṅkaṭam (Andhra Pradesh), the common meeting ground of ' Nitya Sūris ' (ever-free angels in Heaven), the ' Samsāris ' (worldlings) on Earth, birds and beasts. *In the first nine songs of the concluding centum of this decad,* the Āḷvār dwells upon the glory and grandeur of the Lord, the great Saviour and, *in the tenth,* he seeks refuge at the feet of the Lord, through the good offices of Lakṣmī, the Divine Mother, inseparably poised on His winsome chest, voicing forth his sole dependence on Him.

BOOK VII

Seventh Centum—First Decad (VII-1)
(Uḷ nilāviya)

Preamble

In Bhagavad Gīta (VII-14), the Lord stated that those who take refuge in Him alone can get beyond Māyā (Prakṛti). Then and then only, the 'Prakṛti' helps towards liberation instead of hindering by concealing the real nature of the Lord. The net woven around each individual soul by the Almighty Lord, in the light of past Karma, has to be disentangled by Him alone, seeing that we are much-too-feeble and cannot disentangle even the nest built by a frail bird, in the manner it does. Only He can undo this bondage of ours, when we clasp His holy feet as the Sole Saviour. It was against this background that the Āḷvār sought refuge at the feet of the Lord at Tiruvēṅkaṭam in VI-10-10. But then, it didn't yield the desired result immediately. Why was it so?

Who indeed can question the love and integrity of Bharata who did 'Prapatti' (surrender) unto Śrī Rāma, begging of Him to get back to Ayodhyā and take up the reins of the Kingdom? Why did Bharat's surrender not meet with quick response? Well, the Ṛṣhis of Daṇḍakāraṇya had surrendered unto Rāma earlier and He had promised them succour from the depredations of the Rākṣasas. Bound by this earlier commitment, Śrī Rāma could not obviously comply with Bharata's request. Even so, some would appear to have surrendered unto the Lord prior to the point of time at which the Āḷvār did 'Prapatti', praying that they be blest with hymns *par excellence* for their uplift. As a matter of fact, the clue to this kind of inference can be had in X-7-5 which indicates the root-cause for the emergence of Tiruvāymoḷi, as such. That crucial stanza brings out: The sages met at a conclave and decided that they should pray unto the Lord for the birth of a work of this kind, which will do adequate justice in bringing out the Lord's inherent nature, form, attributes, wealth and deeds. This was again due to the fact that they found the Sanskrit Vedantās (upaniṣads), meant to expatiate on the Lord's greatness and grandeur, lagging far behind and retreating, admitting defeat-'yato vāco nivartante'. The Lord Himself sang the Tiruvāymoḷi

through Saint Nammāḷvār as His mouthpiece. Once Tiruvāymoḷi came into being, the sages found it had done full Justice to their cherished objectives and fully covered the various facets of the Lord, enumerated above, with the result that they very much wished that the Lord had still more attributes, treasures etc., so that they can have another work of such excellence, a complete reversal of their attitude towards the Upaniṣads.

And so, it is clear that the Lord deliberately delayed the consummation of the Āḷvār's 'Prapatti' so as to get all the 1102 hymns from his sweet lips, the full length of this splendid treatise which would have otherwise remained truncated.

In this decad, the Āḷvār follows up the trend of thought as in VI-9-9 where he dreaded the mischief of the senses and the frightful possibility of his going astray in the event of the prolongation of his stay in this abode. It might, however, be questioned why the Āḷvār, who was well beyond the mischief of the senses, having taken a deep plunge into the ocean of divine consciousness, should dread in this manner. For this, the Āḷvār has himself provided the answer. This land is notorious for its corrupting influence, bringing within its dirty pale even the 'Nitya Sūris', the Attendants in close proximity to the Lord in Heaven, should they ever happen to come on to this soil. Further, when a person sees the houses all around, on fire, he has got to apprehend the danger of his own house catching fire and safeguard it. A rope lying by the side of an anti-hill, the hide-out of serpents, is easily mistaken for a serpent. So also, the Āḷvār possessing a body like unto that of the worldlings, grows apprehensive about himself, finding those other persons dominated by the wayward senses.

uḷ nilāviya aivarāl kumaitirri, eṉṉai uṉ pātapaṅkayam
naṇṇilāvakaiyē nalivāṉ, iṉṉum eṇṇukiṉrāy:
eṇ ilāp peru māyaṉē! imaiyōrkaḷ ēttum ulakam mūṉṟu uṭai
aṇṇalē! amutē! appaṉē! eṉṉai āḷvāṉē! (VII-1-1)

Translation

Oh, my nectarean Lord, Benefactor great, adored by Celestials,
Māyā (Matter) of dimensions unlimited You have at Your disposal,
My Sire. Master of all the worlds, do You intend this vassal
To be tormented by the senses five within, still,
So that I attain not Your lotus feet lovely?

Notes

(i) The Āḷvār questions the propriety of his being made a prey to the senses haunting him from within, by being kept still in this body by the Lord. Unlike the external enemies who are quite visible and inflict injuries through weapons etc., the five senses, constituting the hidden enemies, torment the individual souls in ever so many ways, a very pathetic and intolerable situation indeed. But then, why should the Āḷvār blame the Lord for this?

(ii) Of the numerous names borne by the Lord, 'Hṛṣikeśa' is one; He is the Controller of the senses (Hṛṣīkam). Ṛṣi Udaṅka approached Lord Kṛṣṇa and queried him thus: "Both kurus and Pāṇḍus are equal to Thee. oh, Lord, and yet, you have caused the destruction of the former while the treatment of the latter has been quite the opposite. How can you be partial?" Lord Kṛṣṇa adduced many a reason for His preference for one party as against the other and ended by pointing out to the sage that Duryodhana and his party were found obstinately averse to all righteousness, despite His indefatigable efforts to turn them from their evil ways, the Kurus had a perversity of will which would not listen to any persuasion and so on. The Ṛṣi, however, coolly retaliated, "But, my Lord, You could certainly have predisposed them also for righteousness".

(iii) The Āḷvār is indeed frightfully agitated as to why he should be kept in this body, exposed to the vagaries of the unruly senses, even after his taking refuge at the feet of the Lord. A learned dissertation on the why and wherefore of this posture can be found in 'Śrīvacana

Bhūṣaṇam' where the illustrious Piḷḷailōkācārya has admirably elucidated, as follows :

The 'Prapanna', that is, a person who has surrendered himself to the loving grace and protection of the Lord, passes time in this world, between revelling in the glory of God and His devotees and contemplation of his own short-comings. Contemplation of his short-comings incites fear of the dreadful possibility of prolongation of the cycle of births and rebirths but the antidote for this lies in recounting the Lord's auspicious qualities of love, mercy, etc., which at once dispels such fears. If, on the other hand, he thought in terms of his own spiritual equipment and advancement as sure hopes for his salvation and tried thereby to get over the fear in question, it would indeed be a case of virtue defeating itself, a self-defeating virtue clouded by conceit. Even as Saint Nammāḻvār has complained in this song, Saint Tirumaṅkai Āḻvār feels terribly panicky about the forbidding prospect of the Lord still condemning him to life inside the mother's womb and, on this account, feels insecure like the tree standing on the fringe of a river, which could be uprooted any moment by floods. This fear and the resultant reproach from these Āḻvārs, however, stem from their intimate bonds with the Lord Whom they regard as their Sole Sustainer. This is just like the child playing in the streets, sustaining an injury at play, rushing home, crying and beating the mother for her apparent slackness in preventing the injury. Apart from their eternal and inviolable bond of relationship, the Lord is Omnipotent and could easily wipe off the malaise of His subjects. And now, considering the relationship between the creatures and the Creator as between children and Mother, it would appear as if God stands responsible for everything that befalls the creatures. For instance, if a child fell into a well, they would hold the mother as blameworthy for her failure to keep a watchful eye on the child and prevent the occurrence. Had she not permitted the child to walk up to the edge of the well, the child would not have fallen into the well.

If non-removal of the child from the vicinity of the well could be construed as permission granted for its stay there, it might as well be argued that it is the same permissive attitude of the Lord that is responsible for the individual straying away from the Lord and getting bogged down in the difficult terrain of 'Samsāra'. Well, this is not the case. Even as the consent of the Individual to submit himself to the Lord's protection is not the cause of the benevolent protection eventually extended by the Lord and it is His own redemptive grace that matters, permission granted by the Lord for the individual's stay in 'Samsāra' is not responsible for the latter's downward trend. Actually, it is the Lord's command that the subjects should conform to the dictates of the Śāstras and work their way up to Him. It is, therefore, but natural that He expects the subjects to show due regard to the Śāstraic decree and injunctions and develop love for Him. In the final analysis however, it turns out that the subjects get stranded over here, enjoying the fruits of their own 'Karma' and it is only the Lord's spontaneous grace that pulls them out of the morass.

(iv) As stated in para 3, above, recounting the Lord's auspicious qualities of love, mercy etc. dispels one's fears. It is worth noting that in every song in this decad the Āḻvār cries forth his fears in the first two lines (*as per original text*), while he dwells upon the Lord's glory and grandeur in the next two lines. As Piḷḷai Tirunarayūr Araiyar put it, the first two lines of each song in this decad are like the outbursts of a child right from the mouth of a tiger facing the Mother in front (In the English rendering of the songs the position is, however, reversed).

eṉṉai aḷum vaṉ kō ōr aintu ivai peytu, irāppakal mōtu-
uṉṉai nāṉ aṇukā vakai ceytu, pōtikaṇṭāy: [vittiṭṭu,
kaṇṇale! amutē! kār mukil vaṇṇaṉē! kaṭal-ñālam kākkiṉṟa
miṉṉu nēmiyiṉāy! viṉaiyēṉuṭai vētiyaṉē! (VII–1–2)

Translation

My most delicious Nectar, Oh, cloud-hued Lord, You wield
The radiant discus which does the ocean-bound worlds shield
Well beyond this sinner's reach, You are by Vedas comprehended,
Me You have consigned to the senses five and their cruel sway
Day and night, and thus from You have kept me away.

Notes

(i) *Āḻvār to the Lord*: My Lord, why should You at all endow me with the refractory senses, which upset the natural order of things and hold me in their cruel grip, day and night? You are so far away that I can't even cry out my woes to you. The natural order of things would be: The individual soul is the vassal of the Lord, the mind is subordinate to the individual and the senses are under the immediate control of the mind, the overall control of the mind and the senses vesting in the Individual. But what is the position now? It is the bottom-most member of the hierarchy that keeps the top-most under its heels!

(ii) *Lord to the Āḻvār*: Oh, Āḻvār, Why do you despise these ancillaries which can be harnessed to the best possible use? The ears can listen to discourses on Me, the tongue can sing My praise, the eyes can behold Me and My devotees, the nostrils can enjoy the sweet odour of the sacred basil (tuḷaci) offered to Me and the body can get locked in My sweet embrace.

(iii) *Āḻvār to the Lord*: If the senses can subserve me in the manner outlined by You, I would certainly love them most. But, it is the other way round and they only distract me from my single-minded devotion unto You and hence my complaint about my continued stay in this explosive setting. It is like Your presenting the fake-deer before Sitā and putting her into the hands of the seven hundred odd Rākṣasis in Laṅkā, who teased and tormented her.

(iv) *Lord to the Āḻvār*: In the untoward contingency of the senses overpowering you, better let me know so that I do apply the necessary remedies.

(v) *Āḻvār to the Lord*: But then, my Lord, You are quite out of hand and I am not in a position to lodge my complaint. Had You not unravelled unto me Your glorious Form, I would jolly well like to be in the company of the senses unmindful of You. But now, I just dread every moment the mischief of the senses which might lead me astray. And You keep Yourself away, out of sight, as if You have to be comprehended only through the Vedas instead of my enjoying You through direct perception!

vētiyāniṟkum aivarāl viṉaiyēṉai mōtuvittu, uṉ tiruvaṭic
cātiyāvakai nī taṭuttu, eṉ peṟuti? antō!
āṭi āki, akal-iṭam paṭaittu, uṇṭu, umiḻntu, kaṭantu, iṭantiṭṭa
cōti nīḷ muṭiyāy! toṇṭaṉēṉ matucūtaṉaṉē! (VII–1–3)

Translation

Oh Lord, sporting the long crown radiant, the worlds You did create
And gulped them down during deluge and later spat out,
You spanned them once and again, from deep waters, pulled out;
Oh, Slayer of Matu, You did enthral me but then, shut me out
From Your lovely feet, flocking me against the senses with no respite,
Alas! this sinner knows not how, by this, You do profit.

Notes

(i) The Scriptures enjoin that the Brahmins should tend the ritualistic (sacramental) fire throughout life and stipulate the morning and the evening as the periods during which it should be done. The Āḻvār, however, yearned to serve the Lord all his life without any intermission whatever. But what is happening? He is cruelly dominated by the wayward senses without break.

(ii) The wondrous deeds of the Lord, mentioned in this song reveal Him as the Benign Sustainer, but the question now is, why He does not play the same beneficent role, in the case of the Āḻvār also, without keeping him under the terrific clutches of the malignant senses.

cūtu nāṉ aṟiyāvakai cuḻaṟṟi, ōr aivaraik kāṭṭi, uṉ aṭip
pōtu nāṉ aṇukāvakai ceytu, pōtikaṇṭāy:
yātum yāvarum iṉṟi niṉ akampāl oṭukki, ōr āliṉ nīḷ ilai-
mītu cēr kuḻavi! viṉaiyēṉ viṉaitīr maruntē! (VII–1–4)

Translation

As a mere Babe, You lay on a tender, fig-leaf, oh, Lord,
And did in a corner of Your stomach all things and beings hold;
You are the drug that cures the ills of this sinner
And yet confounding me, You did put me into the snare ;
Of the senses five, on the sly, keeping me very far
From Your lotus feet, invisible and far off that You are.

Notes

The Āḻvār bitterly complains that:

(i) The Lord, who had weaned him away from the mischief of the senses and cured him of all his sins, has now exposed him to the serious risk of slipping back to his old ways;

(ii) The Lord has bewildered the Āḻvār who was looking upon His feet as the Sole Refuge, by bringing him once again under the cruel spell of the five senses and

(iii) The Lord has kept aloof from him, lest He should have to shed His grace on him, in case He stood beside him; as a matter of fact, he would have put up with any amount of torture by the senses, if only the Lord could be visualised by him, all the time.

tīr maruntu iṉṟi, aintu nōy aṭum cekkil iṭṭut tirikkum aivarai
nēr maruṅku uṭaittā aṭaittu, nekiḻppāṉ okkiṉṟāy:
ār maruntu iṉi ākuvār-aṭal āḻi ēnti, acurar vaṉ kulam
vēr maruṅku aṟuttāy! viṇṇuḷār perumāṉē? ō! (VII–1–5)

Translation

Oh, Lord of Celestials, You have cut out, root and branch,
The mighty hordes of Acurar, with Your discus radiant;
Into the grinding mill where the sense-organs will crunch
Me under the impact of the senses five, with no way out,
You have pushed me, it looks as if your hold on me
You are loosening. Who indeed will hereafter my elixir be?

Notes

(i) The grinding mill is the human body where the five senses are ever active with the relative activities and their ramifications leaving no chance for the soul to thrive, crushing it beyond recognition and making redemption impossible, even by the omnipotent Lord. By putting it down as an incurable state of affairs, the Āḻvār only stresses the severity of the impact of the senses, like unto the young warrior (Abhimanyu, the great hero of Mahābhārata) caught up inextricably in the enemy camp amidst doyens and super-doyens of warfare.

(ii) If the Lord, who is at once the Drug and the Doctor, gave up the subject, could there be any cure for the malady? How could any one survive without that infallible medicine, the Lord? That is why the text of the song is " *Who* shall be my elixir? " instead of ' *What* shall be my life-saving drug? "; the drug being an inanimate substance, is usually referred to in the neuter gender.

(iii) The Āḻvār's address to the Lord as the Chief of the Celestials is meant to stir up the feelings of the Celestials in that glorious setting of unalloyed bliss and draw their attention to his own critical condition down below. This is like unto the wailing of Sītā, during her captivity in Laṅkā.

viṇṇuḷār perumāṟku aṭimai ceyvāraiyum ceṟum aimpulaṉ ivai
maṇṇuḷ eṉṉaip peṟṟāl, eṉ ceyyā-maṟṟu nīyum viṭṭāl?
paṇṇuḷāy! kavi taṉṉuḷāy! pattiyiṉ uḷḷāy! paramīcaṉē! vantu, eṉ
kaṇṇuḷāy! neñcuḷāy? colluḷāy! oṉṟu collāyē. (VII–1–6)

Translation

Oh, Supreme Lord, my yearning, its depth and voice You know,
Reside You do in my eyes and mind and the word I utter,
Can't You unto me come and a word of comfort utter?
The senses five will taint even the Celestials, in Your service aglow,
Should they this soil touch; what is it these won't do
In regard to poor me if I am given up by You too?

Note

Even exalted persons, in the upper regions, including the high Heavens are not above the mischief of the senses. That being so, the Āḻvār's fears are indeed well-founded, the more so, when he stays in this physical body and in this land of dark nescience. To cite but a few instances of the havoc played by the senses on noted personages, let us take first, Indra, the Chief of the Devas. Among the many atrocities committed by the formidable Narakāsura from his abode in Prākjyōtiṣa on Earth, was the snatching of the precious ear-rings of Aditi, Indra's mother. At Indra's request, Lord Kṛṣṇa slew the demon and went to Indra's citadel along with queen Satyabhāmā, mounted on Garuḍa to restore the ear-rings to the venerable lady. The conceited and ungrateful Indrāṇi, Indra's consort, however, thought Satyabhāmā, a mere human, living on Earth down below, unworthy of being offered the Pārijātha flower, grown exclusively in Devalokā for the exclusive use of the women-folk there. This only excited the curiosity of the distinguished visitor who managed to have the very tree uprooted by Lord Kṛṣṇa from Indrā's garden. As the divine couple were flying back to Earth on Garuḍa along with the tree in question, Indrāṇi got scent of it and at her instance, Indra, along with his soldiers, intercepted and fought a pitched battle with Lord Kṛṣṇa. The Lord made them bite the dust, resumed His flight to Earth and planted the tree in Sathyabhāmā's garden. What a disgraceful behaviour of Indra, consumed by conceit going to war with his great Benefactor, right on the heels of the help received from Him!

And then, did Garuḍa, adorning the glorious rank of 'Nitya Sūris' in Heaven, fare any better ? Sumukha, the serpent, when hotly pursued by Garuḍa, took refuge at the feet of Lord Kṛṣṇa. When Garuḍa requested the Lord to part with the serpent, He declined to do so and, on the top of that, entrusted the serpent to Garuḍa's safe keeping. The mentally upset Garuḍa had then the cheek to tell the Lord: "Well, You have snatched my very food from me. Is it for this that I have been lifting you and your consorts on my back, all these days?" On another occasion, Garuḍa took pride in his immense strength and boastfully enquired of the Lord whether there was indeed any one more powerful than he, who could carry effortlessly, at the tip of his plumes, the Omnipotent Lord and His consorts. The Lord chided the presumptuous Garuḍa and disclosed to him that all the three worlds put together can hardly bear His weight and that the truth of the matter is that He supports Himself and Garuḍa who was supposed to carry Him and His consorts. So saying, He placed just one arm on Garuḍa's shoulder and asked him if he could sustain it. Poor Garuḍa fell down fainting, unable to bear the weight of a single arm of the Lord.

Sugrīva, the monkey-king abused the kindness of Śrī Rāma and just lost count of time, immersed in the pleasures of wine and women. And then, a sage of the eminence of Viswāmitra fell an easy prey to the meretricious charms of Menaka and had a rapport with her for ten long years till he got jolted back to normal thinking.

The Supreme Lord, who holds sway all over and who can't but bear the Āḻvār's heart-rending appeal and note the depth of feeling behind it, is nevertheless holding Himself back and it is indeed a matter of deep regret for the Āḻvār.

oṉṟu colli oruttiṉil niṟkilāta ōr aivar vaṉ kayavarai
eṉṟu yāṉ velkiṟpaṉ-uṉ tiruvaruḷ illaiyēl?
aṉṟu tēvar acurar vāṅka, alaikaṭal aravam aḻāvi, ōr
kuṉṟam vaitta entāy! koṭiyeṉ paruku iṉ amutē! (VII-1-7)

Translation

My Lord, You are the Nectar grand, by this sinner drunk,
The mountain huge You once planted in surging waters
And made the Devas and Asuras churn it with a serpent;
But for Your sweet grace how can I the senses conquer,
Notoriously fickle, not sticking to one thing or the other?'

Notes

(i) The churning episode reveals the extent to which the Lord would go to help His devotees in multifarious roles, and yet, if He does not go to the rescue of the Āḻvār, how can he at all get the better of the notoriously fickle senses?

(ii) *The Nectar grand, drunk by this sinner*: Far from being satisfied with the interior bliss with which the Lord has endowed him in super-abundance, the Āḻvār complains that this is not supplemented by external perception and experiences. Conscious of his ingratitude in not acknowledging the many favours already heaped on him by the Lord but running into a complaining mood, the Āḻvār calls himself a sinner.

iṉ amutu eṉat tōṉṟi ōr aivar yāvaraiyum mayakka, nī vaitta
muṉṉam māyam ellām muḻu vēr arintu, eṉṉai uṉ
ciṉṉamum tiru mūrttiyum cintittu, ēttik kaitoḻavē, aruḷ eṉakku:
eṉ ammā! eṉ kaṇṇā! imaiyōr-tam kulamutalē! (VII-1-8)

Translation

Kaṇṇā, my Lord, Chief of Celestials, Your grace I invoke
To cut out, root and branch, my age-long yoke
Unto Samsāra, the senses five under the garb of pleasures nectarean,
Which cast their spell on one and all just your creation
And fix my mind on your insignia (the conch and discus fine)
Your Form exquisite, sing your glory and worship you, all the time.

Note

The sensual pleasures of sound, sight, smell, touch and taste, assume the garb of happiness, to begin with and eventually

throw the participants into the abyss of endless miseries. Hence, the request of the Āḻvār that he be studiously kept beyond their mischief so that he may constantly meditate on the Lord's exquisite Form, wondrous weapons etc, sing His glory and worship Him, thus involving himself in such exclusive participation, by word, deed and thought.

kulam mutal aṭum tīviṉaik koṭu vaṉ kuḻiyiṉil vīḻkkum aivarai
valam mutal keṭukkum varamē tantaruḷkaṇṭāy—
nilam mutal iṉi ev ulakukkum niṟpaṉa, celvaṉa eṉap poruḷ
pala mutal paṭaittāy! eṉ kaṇṇā! eṉ parañcuṭarē! (VII-1-9)

Translation

My Kaṇṇā of splendour supreme, the worlds You did create
And their contents, still and mobile; of you do I entreat
To dower on me robust strength to cut out, branch and root
The senses five, breeding sins which would the entire clan uproot.

Note

The sins committed by the sense-buried affect generations, back and forth. c.f. Hanumān's advice to Rāvaṇa, that one of the latter's calibre and wisdom should desist from committing sins which shall destroy the entire race. The Āḻvār wants the Lord to dower on him the strength which will make him tougher than this tough fountain-source of all sins, so as to demolish it effectively.

eṉ parañcuṭarē! eṉṟu uṉṉai, alaṟṟi, uṉ īṉait tāmaraikaṭku
aṉpu uruki niṟkum-atu niṟka, cumaṭu tantāy;
vaṉ parankaḷ eṭuttu aivar ticaiticai valittu eṟṟukiṉṟaṉar-
muṉ paravai kaṭaintu amutam koṇṭa mūrtti! o! (VII-1-10)

Translation

Oh, Lord, You churned the ocean once and delivered the nectar,
Steeped in love unto Your lotus feet, I am bound to utter
Your sweet names, oh Splendour Supreme! but this burden
(body) You did dower,

For me to groan under its weight and the senses five do shatter
Poor me, pulling in different directions, alas! I can hardly bear.

Note

The Alvar is puzzled how the Lord gives nectar to some and the sense-bound body to some, like unto a deadly poison. The very body, dowered by Him for God-enjoyment, has deteriorated into a facile field for the foul play of the domineering senses, each pulling in a different direction; oh, what a tragic picture, like unto a Prince standing on the road-side, wearing a head-gear for carrying load, in place of his regal crown, being forced by strangers to carry their loads!

koṇṭa mūrtti ōr mūvarāyk kuṇaṅkaḷ paṭaittu aḻittuk keṭuk-
puṇṭarīkak koppūḻp puṉal-paḷḷi appaṉukkē [kum ap
toṇṭar toṇṭar toṇṭar toṇṭaṉ caṭakōpaṉ col āyirattuḷ ip pattum
kaṇṭu pāṭa vallār viṉai pōm, kaṅkuḷum pakalē. (VII-1-11)

Translation

Gone are the sins of those who sing day and night these songs ten,
With understanding fine, out of the thousand composed by Caṭakōpaṉ,
The vassal of the vassals' vassals of Lord Padmanābhaṉ,
Who, as Trinity, carries out the functions of creation, preservation and dissolution
And who, during deluge, did on the vast expanse of water recline.

Notes

(i) Lord Nārāyaṇa, on whose navel emerged the lotus flower on which Brahmā appeared, carries out the triple functions of creation, sustentation and dissolution, the middle one by Himself and the other two as the Internal Controller of Brahmā and Śiva.

(ii) The Āḻvār seeks to assuage his mental agony in talking about the senses and sensuality, by going the whole hog out in the service of the devout, like unto a parched-up soul diving fast into the deep pockets of water.

Seventh Centum—Second Decad (VII-2) (Kaṅkulum Pakalum)

Preamble

Towards the end of the sixth centum, we saw the Āḻvār surrendering himself at the feet of the Lord at Tiruvēṅkaṭam. Finding, however, that he was still lingering in this material world, dominated by the unruly senses, he cried out his fears in the last decad, like unto a child crying out from the tiger's jaws, facing the mother standing in front. The Lord was, no doubt, well aware of the intensity of the Āḻvār's God-love and his deep yearning to get out of the material shackles with no further delay. And yet, He deliberately prolonged the Āḻvār's stay in this abode and his resultant uneasiness, just to do lasting good to the world at large through him. Of course, this is like starving one's children and entertaining the guests. Actually, the Āḻvār wrought the miracle of transforming the very duds and the deluded, given up as incorrigibles even by the Omnipotent Lord and every moment of his stay in this abode would certainly enrich the world through the scintillating hymns flowing from his lips, both by way of adoring the Lord and advising the world.

But then, the Āḻvār, in deep anguish, is once again (figuratively) transformed as the Nāyakī (Mistress), weighed down by melancholy too deep for words. The critical condition of the speechless Nāyakī and her various moods are narrated in this decad by the (Imagined) mother to Lord Raṅganātha, enshrined in Śrīraṅgam (Tamilnadu), bending over her daughter, right in the Sanctum. The mother enquires of Lord Raṅganātha, the Sole Saviour, as to what His intentions are and how exactly He would like to deal with her love-torn daughter.

Whenever Śrī Parāśara Bhaṭṭar discoursed on this decad, he would place both his palms over his head, charged with emotion, and cry, " How can we, hard-hearted people, incapable of feeling the pulse of Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī, her sentiments and yearning do justice to the words of deep love uttered by her in this decad? " How can any one indeed enter into the spirit of the Nayakī whose torrential tears were bailed out by her palms? It was like attempting to drain off the oceanic waters with a tiny leaf. c.f. Hanumān's

enquiry as soon as he met Sītā in Aśoka vana how it was that tears kept flowing from her lovely eyes like a cascade.

kaṅkulum pakalum kaṇ tuyil aṟiyāḷ;
 kaṇṇa nīr kaikaḷāl iṟaikkum;
caṇku cakkaraṅkaḷ! eṉṟu kai kūppum;
 tāmaraik kaṇ! eṉṟē taḷarum;
eṉṉaṉē tarikkēṉ uṉṉai viṭṭu? eṉṉum;
 iru nilam kai tuḷā irukkum—
ceṅkayal pāy nīrt tiruvaraṅkattāy!
 ivaḷ tiṟattu eṉ ceykiṉṟāyē? (VII–2–1)

Translation

Oh, Lord, reclining in Tiruvaraṅkam where flows water in abundance;
And the gay fish gambol, this lady knows no sleep, day and night,
Tears in torrents from her eyes do flow and she with her palms bails them out;
Utters she with joined palms, "Oh conch,", "Oh discus", "these are the lotus eyes",
She says and reels, all earth she gropes for her Lord from whom she can't bear
Being apart, what indeed do you intend doing with her?

Notes

(i) The worldlings are steeped in sleep, both day and night, while the Celestials in Heaven have neither nights nor sleep. The Nāyakī also knows no sleep, like the Celestials. It is said that she knows no sleep instead of saying that she doesn't sleep, because when in communion with the Lord, He wouldn't allow her to sleep and, when away from Him, she is so disconsolate and dejected that she just can't sleep. Either way, sleep is unknown to her.

(ii) Tears trickling down the cheeks copiously could be a common occurrence in the case of devout contemplation of the Lord's auspicious traits and heroic deeds. Bailing out the tears with the Nāyakī's palms, denotes the abundance of tears like the water in the river Cauvery flowing around. Reference to the fish joyfully dancing in the river waters carries with it the suggestion that even as the fish cannot stay out of water, the Nāyakī can't stay apart from the Lord. Delirious that she is, she can still behold the Lord in His iconic Form right in front and suddenly she exclaims, "here is the conch, here is the discus, here are the lotus-eyes" and so on. As one subsisting solely on Him, she can't bear being apart from Him and she says so. Even then, she can't find Him beside her and she runs her fingers through the whole Earth in search of Him, as if He is handy, like taking sandal paste from a porcelain cup.

(iii) The mother exhibits the love-smitten Nāyakī even as the Ṛṣis of Daṇḍakāraṇya showed Rāma their emaciated bodies, tortured and tormented by the Rākṣasas and enquires of Lord Raṅganātha what He proposes to do with her daughter, as the Lord's remembrance of the individual in the light of his ultimate redemption, is the only 'Means' for his salvation. (see also aphorism 66 of Śrīvacanabhūṣaṇam).

eṉ ceykiṉṟāy, eṉ tāmaraik kaṇṇā?
 eṉṉum; kaṇṇīr malka irukkum;
eṉ ceykēṉ, eṟi nīrt tiruvaraṅkattāy?
 eṉṉum; vevvuyirttu uyirttu urukum;
muṉ ceyta viṉaiyē! mukappaṭāy eṉṉum;
 mukilvaṇṇā! takuvatō? eṉṉum—
muṉ ceytu iv ulakam uṇṭu, umiḻntu, aḷantāy!
 eṉkolō muṭikiṉṟatu ivaṭkē? (VII–2–2)

Translation

"My lotus-eyed Lord, unto me what will you do?"
Is the question by this lady put, her eyes filled with tears,
She stands still and queries again, 'What shall I do
To get at you, oh, Lord of Tiruvaraṅkam with surging waters?'
Says she, panting and breathing hot, 'Come before me, my past sins,",
'Oh cloud-hued Lord! is this all your mercy?', unto this girl tense,

Say what will happen, Oh, Lord, Who the worlds did create,
Ate and spat, spanned and did many such things, them to protect?

Notes

(i) The Nāyakī would like to know what those massive sins committed by her, are, which stand between her and the Lord. That only shows, she is painfully conscious of the fact that she has to face the consequences of her past sins, instead of blaming the Lord. But then, the cloud-hued Lord, known for His munificence like the rain-clouds, could, in the exercise of His quality of mercy, wipe off the sins, *in toto*, and in no time.

(ii) Breathing hot, the Nāyakī melts under the impact of that heat as if she isn't there to sigh anymore.

(iii) So great is the heat generated by her separation from the Lord that she would like to be thrown by some one into the cool waters of the river Kāvēri in Śrīraṅgam, the river Tāmraparṇi in her birth place having already become hot because of her desolation.

vaṭku ilaḷ iṟaiyum; maṇivaṇṇā! eṉṉum;
vāṉamē nōkkum; maiyākkum;
uṭku uṭai acurar uyir ellām uṇṭa
oruvaṉē! eṉṉum; uḷ urukum;
kaṭkilī! uṉṉaik kāṇumāṟu aruḷāy;
kākuttā! kaṇṇaṉē! eṉṉum—
tiṇ koṭi matiḷ cūḻ tiruvaraṅkattāy!
ivaḷtiṟattu eṉ ceytiṭṭāyē? (VII–2–3)

Translation

Shaking off all reserve, this lady calls out, "Oh, Lord of sapphire hue,"
And at the sky gazes, pining for Him unique, Who slew
The Asuras formidable, thawing down, she prays, "Oh, Lord invisible,
You did incarnate as Kākuttā (Rama) and Kaṇṇaṉ, make yourself visible

Unto me now"; Oh, Lord, who in Tiruvaraṅkam does recline,
The walled city strong, what's it you have unto this girl done?

Notes

(i) The mother is amazed at the complete lack of the innate modesty on the part of her love-intoxicated daughter, her calling out loudly the name of her spouse and that too, the one indicative of His bewitching Form which she ought to enjoy secretly at heart.

(ii) The Lord, who slew the Asuras and relieved the distress of the Devas, notoriously selfish, should certainly rush to the aid of the weaker sex, particularly those who cling to His feet under all circumstances.

(iii) The upaniṣads state that the Lord will exhibit His exquisite Form and splendour to the subjects of His choice. It is this that emboldens the Nāyakī to call upon Him to appear before her. The Incarnate Forms like Rāma and Kṛṣṇa could, of course, not be seen at all times, they having already gone back to the Celestium. So then, the Āḻvār wants the Lord at Tiruvaraṅkam to appear before him in His iconic Form. Actually, the tough walls of the holy place would seem to extend an invitataion to the devout to come and enjoy the Lord reclining there in His worshippable form all the time, unlike the Lord's incarnations, the irretrievable past.

(iv) The mother wants to know what exactly the Lord had done to bring about this kind of infatuation in her daughter.

iṭṭa kāl, iṭṭa kaiyaḷāy irukkum;
eḻuntu ulāy mayaṅkum; kai kūppum;
kaṭṭamē kātal eṉṟu mūrccikkum;
kaṭalvaṇṇā! kaṭiyaikāṇ eṉṉum;
vaṭṭa vāy nēmi valaṅkaiyā! eṉṉum;
vantitāy eṉṟu eṉṟē mayaṅkum-
ciṭṭaṉē! ceḻu nīrt tiruvaraṅkattāy!
ivaḷtiṟattu eṉ cintittāyē? (VII–2–4)

Translation

Sometimes this lady is motionless and she moves about, at times,
Insensate she remains but still seen with joined palms,
She swoons, exclaiming, "God-love is indeed hard to endure";
Says she, "Oh, sea-hued Lord, You are unto me much too severe",
Calling out many a time, Him that wields the discus round
In His right hand, she faints when He comes not; oh, Lord immaculate,
Reclining in fertile Tiruvaraṅkam, what is it you do for her contemplate?

Notes

(i) The Nâyakî, intoxicated with God-love, exhibits the same behaviour as those struck by Śri Rāma's mighty arrows. The targets of those arrows will be severally seen fainting with pain, tortured or running about here and there in great fright. So also, the Nâyakî is at times insensate, sometimes, she moves about here and there agitated, and at other times, feels tortured by the immensity of her God-hunger still remaining unappeased. The Āḻvâr, who was hitherto looking upon God-love as an end in itself, now feels it a terrible-tormenter, much beyond his capacity to endure.

(ii) The mother's reference to an Immaculate God is rather ironical. She seems to suggest that, after inflicting all this pain on her daughter, He masquerades as the perfect One, like unto a Brahmin going about chanting Vedas, wearing white sacred thread and twisted Kuśā grass in the fourth finger, the very picture of a perfect Brahmin, after killing several Brahmins.

(iii) *Fertile Tiruvaraṅkam*: The mother chides the Lord whether He came down to that cosy place only to sleep away, unmindful of the precarious condition of her daughter and His duty towards her.

cintikkum; ticaikkum; tēṟum; kai kūppum;
    tiruvaraṅkattuḷḷāy! eṉṉum;
vantikkum; āṅkē maḻaikkaṇ nīr malka,
    vantiṭāy eṉṟu eṉṟē mayaṅkum—
antippōtu avuṇaṉ uṭal iṭantāṉē!
    alai kaṭal kaṭainta ār amutē!
cantittu uṉ caraṇam cārvatē valitta
    taiyalai maiyal ceytāṉē! (VII–2–5)

Translation

Oh, Lord, Avuṇaṉ's body you tore off at twilight,
You are the Nectar insatiable that churned the ocean,
You have the heart of this lady stolen,
With resolve firm to join you and stay at your feet,
Dwindles she in contemplation of her erstwhile union;
Suddenly rallies round and with joined palms and head bent,
She calls out, "Oh, Lord in Tiruvaraṅkam", and tears from her eyes do rain,
"You haven't come, You haven't come", she utters and faints.

Notes

(i) Turning the searchlight inward, the Nâyakî finds that a soul, badly caught up in the vortex of worldly life, with its terrific involvement in a recurring cycle of birth and death, was attracted by the Lord's bewitching eyes, had the blissful union with Him for a while, only to be deserted by Him as at present. Contemplating thus, she breaks down and even then, her palms are joined in reverence, a unique feature of hers, under all circumstances.

(ii) Despite the Lord having taken up His abode in Tiruvaraṅkam, in His worshippable (Iconic) Form, it is indeed distressing that He hasn't obliged the Āḻvār with His presence. Did He not assume the Form of Narasinga and keep Himself ready for emergence at the precise moment, where and when His presence would be demanded, all for the sake of the young lad, Prahlāda, son of Avuṇaṉ (Hiraṇya)?

(iii) *Stealing the heart of this lady*: It was just because a mere crow inflicted a slight injury son the person of His beloved consort, Śri Rāma sent 'Brahmástra', a super-missile, in hot pursuit of the little creature, literarally applying heroic remedies for petty maladies. Even so, He took great pains to enthral a petty soul like the Āḷvār's and the latter gave away her heart unto Him, in sweet contemplation of this great gesture on His part.

(iv) The three successive stages of love to God, indicated in this song, are worth noting. These are *Recollection, Trance* and *Rallying—recollection* of all the past ravishments vouchsafed by the benign Lord, trance, fainting in desolation caused by such recollection in the light of the present state of non-enjoyment and *rallying*, that is, the sudden lucidity while in the trance state considered to be very dangerous indeed. The momentary lucidity in a delirious state, is akin to the sudden lighting up of consciousness in a person under the spell of death-coma or the sudden flicker of the dying light. That was the reason why Nañciyar exclaimed, with great fright, when Uyntapiḷḷai, ciyar's disciple, recited this song, "Woe unto her (Saint's) lucidity! I am undone".

maiyal ceytu eṉṉai maṉam kavarntāṉē!
eṉṉum; mā māyaṉē eṉṉum-
ceyya vāy maṇiyē! eṉṉum; taṉ puṉal cūḷ
tiruvaraṅkattuḷḷāy! eṉṉum;
veyya vāḷ, taṇṭu, caṅku, cakkaram, vil
eṉtum viṇṇōr mutal! eṉṉum;-
pai koḷ pāmpu aṇaiyāy! ivaḷtiṟattu aruḷāy-
pāviyēṉ ceyaṟpālatuvē. (VII-2-6)

Translation

Please say what this sinner can do unto her daughter,
Who exclaims, "Oh, you that enticed me and stole my heart,"

"You that worked many wonders huge,", "Oh, Araṅkaṉ reclining amid cool waters?"
"You of sapphire hue, with lips red, Chief of Celestials, wielding weapons hot,"
And so on, Oh, Lord, reclining on the hooded serpent,

Note

The mother says unto Lord Raṅganāthā;

"My daughter keeps wondering how you stole her heart, by engendering in her enormous love, how, during your union with her, you worked many wonders such as exhibiting your loving condescension of amazing magnitude, how you enthralled her by your exquisite physical charm, your red lips and sapphire hue, how you don't come unto her, although so very near in Tiruvaraṅkam, how your mighty weapons do not cut out her sins, if at all, they do stand between you and her and so on. Should you not be inseparable from my daughter even as you cling to your serpent-bed? How is it you relax yourself on this cosy bed, when my daughter is struggling hard, panting for you, as above? Please say what this sinner (self) witnessing the sad spectacle, can at all do to relieve my daughter's distress".

pāla tuṉpaṅkaḷ iṉpaṅkaḷ paṭaittāy!
paṟṟilār paṟṟa niṉṟāṉē!
kāla cakkarattāy! kaṭal iṭam koṇṭa
kaṭalvaṇṇā! kaṇṇaṉē? eṉṉum;
cēl koḷ taṉ puṉal cūḷ tiruvaraṅkattāy!
eṉṉum; eṉ tīrttaṉē eṉṉum;
kōla mā maḷaikkaṉ paṇi malka irukkum-
eṉṉuṭaik kōmaḷak koḷuntē. (VII-2-7)

Translation

Says my tender darling, her eyes, cool and lovely, filled with tears,
"Oh, Distributor of weal and woe among your creatures,
Even unto those who seek not refuge in you, you are the Protector,

Oh, Controller of the wheel of Time, the Milk-ocean is your abode,
Oh, sea-hued Lord, Oh, Kaṇṇā, You that in Tiruvaraṅkam do reside,
Amid cool waters full of fish, You, my Sanctifier, and so on.

Notes

The Nāyakī's address, as above, quoted by the Mother, when analysed, would reveal her trend of thought as follows:

(i) My Lord, You are known to inflict miseries on the ungodly and regale the devout. Perhaps, you have excluded me from the scope of such a dispensation.

(ii) My Lord, You carry the credential that you extend protection even to those who do not submit themselves as such to your protection (Aśaraṇya Śaraṇyaḥ) and yet, you torment me like this. Paradoxically, a prickly plant has been glorified as a grand tree, like unto the wish-yielding tree.

(iii) Oh, Lord, if you mean to say that the propitious time for my succour has not yet arrived, may I point out to you that time is at your beck and call?

(iv) Reference to Lord Raṅganātha, in the midst of cool waters, full of fish, points to the Nāyakī's incapacity to stay apart from Him even as fish can't stay out of water. And yet, can He afford to Keep away from the Nāyakī?

(v) "*You, my Sanctifier*!" The Lord has instilled in the Nāyakī sanctity, by way of endowing her with the firm conviction that He is her sole Saviour, a belief which remains unshaken, even in the most desperate situation.

(vi) *Tender darling* like unto a creeper which can thrive only when it twists round a pole, firm and fixed, like unto the Lord Himself. The mother says, her daughter is shedding tears in plenty, unable to endure her separation from the Lord. Actually, it was on account of His indefatigable efforts that He has been able to induct in her such assiduous love for Him and yet, He would not come and see for Himself, the fruits of His labour!

koḷuntu vāṉavarkaṭku! eṉṉum; kuṉṟu ēnti,
kō-nirai kāttavaṉ! eṉṉum;
aḷum; toḷum! āvi aṉala vevvuyirkkum;
añcaṉa vaṇṇaṉē! eṉṉum;
eḻuntu, mēl nōkki, imaippilaḷ irukkum;
eṅṅaṉē nōkkukēṉ? eṉṉum-
ceḷum taṭam puṉal cūḻ tiruvaraṅkattāy!
eṉ ceykēṉ eṉ tirumakaṭkē? (VII–2–8)

Translation

Oh, Lord, reclining in Tiruvaraṅkam amid sacred waters, what shall I do
For my daughter, like unto Tirumakaḷ, ever calling you,
'Oh Chief of Celestials, Oh, Lifter of Mount (Govardhan) and Protector of cows, '?
With joined palms and tearful eyes, breathing hot she calls,
'Oh, dark-hued Lord, ' gazing at the sky she would ask
How and where indeed she could for you look.

Notes

(i) The Nāyakī mentions, side by side, the Lord's supremacy and simplicity, so that one need not be scared of the former nor be tempted to underrate Him because of the latter ;

(ii) The mother suggests that the Lord should be inseparably attached to her daughter even as Tirumakaḷ (Mahālakṣmī) inheres in His chest always, brooking no separation;

(iii) Not sighting the Lord in the direction she looks up, the Nāyakī would turn behind in the fond hope that He might take her by surpirse, and embrace her from behind.

eṉ tirumakaḷ cēr mārvaṉē! eṉṉum; eṉṉuṭai āviyē! eṉṉum;
niṉ tiru eyiṟṟāl iṭantu, nī koṇṭa nilamakaḷ kēḷvaṉē! eṉṉum;
aṉṟu uru ēḻum taḻuvi, nī koṇṭa āymakaḷ aṉpaṉē! eṉṉum-
teṉ tiruvaraṅkam kōyilkoṇṭāṉē! teḷikilēṉ muṭivu ivaḷ-taṉakkē.
(VII-2-9)

Translation

Oh, Lord in Teṉtiruvaraṅkam enshrined, 'tisn't unto me clear
What indeed will be the end of this lady's inordinate longing;
Calls she, "Oh, my Soul, bearing on Your chest Tirumakaḷ, my Mother,"
"Oh Spouse of Dame Earth whom You lifted on Your bent tooth long,"
"Oh, dear One unto the shepherd girl whom you once took over,
Slaying the unruly bulls seven with the voice of thunder,"

Notes

(i) The Nāyaki wonders how she could suffer inspite of Tirumakaḷ (Mahālakṣmī), the unfailing Intercessor between the Lord and His subjects being ever present on His winsome chest. The Lord is the soul of all souls and what is more, the Mother is always in conjunction with Him; here then is a grand setting, the soul of our soul, the super-soul being a mighty combination, highly conducive to our well-being. When Nañciyar spelt out in one breath, without a break, the first line of this song as in the original text, (third line here), so as to yield this meaning, his preceptor, Parāśara Bhaṭṭar, the high Priest of Lord Raṅganātha, was taking food and listening to the marvellous recital by the inspired Saint. Thrilled by this manner of chanting, with the new light thrown on the text, Bhaṭṭārya stopped eating and reclined in the easy chair, wrapt in rapturous meditation.

This way of addressing God is indeed very fascinating. Tradition has it that the famous Anantāḻvān named his daughter as "My Mother, Lakṣmī" (En Tirumakaḷ) Śrī Parāśara Bhaṭṭar, reputed to be no less than the son of Lord, please consider me as but a part of the bridal outfit of Your consort, Mahālakṣmī, my Mother and also grant that I may love You as the Beloved of my Mother-(Aḻakiya Maṇavāḷa or Lovely Spouse)".

(ii) The Lord can be dear to Mother Earth only if He could take care of her favourites like the Nāyakī.

(iii) "Having slain the seven unruly bulls with thunderous voice, for winning the hand of Goddess Nīḷā, incarnated as Nappiṉṉai, the shepherdess, Oh, Lord, you are now relaxing in Tiruvaraṅkam on your serpent-bed. How indeed do you intend to put an end to my daughter's afflictions?", asks the gnostic mother of Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī.

muṭivu ivaḷ-taṉakku oṉṟu aṟikilēṉ eṉṉum;
mūvulaku āḷiyē! eṉṉum;
kaṭi kamaḻ koṉṟaic caṭaiyaṉē! eṉṉum;
nāṉmukak kaṭavuḷē! eṉṉum;
vaṭivu uṭai vāṉōr talaivaṉē! eṉṉum;
vaṇ tiruvaraṅkaṉē! eṉṉum;
aṭi aṭaiyātāḷ pōl ivaḷ aṇuki,
aṭaintaṉaḷ-mukilvaṇṇaṉ aṭiyē. (VII-2-10)

Translation

It seemed this lady panting for the Lord wouldn't attain Him,
'I know not the end of my sufferings at all', she did exclaim,
"Oh, Supreme Master of the three worlds,", "Oh Internal Controller
Of Śiva wearing on matted locks fragrant flowers
And Brahmā, the four-headed," "Oh, Chief of Celestials of like form,",
"Oh, generous Tiruvaraṅka," and so on, but now has she attained
The lovely feet of the cloud-hued Lord indeed!

Notes

(i) The mother is mighty glad that her daughter, who was in a hopelessly desperate condition with no prospect

of an early end to her sufferings, has, after all, attained the feet of Lord Raṅganātha Who is graciously reclining in Tiruvaraṅkam so as to be worshipped by all down below desirous of beholding and enjoying His exquisite Form, instead of being the close preserve of the denizens in Heaven.

(ii) The Celestials in Heaven are endowed with a form like unto the Lord's own and what is more, the continual stream of joy flowing unto them from the Lord who is an inexhaustible fountain of bliss, is reflected on their person enhancing their charm, ever more.

mukilvaṇṇaṉ aṭiyai aṭaintu, arul cūṭi
uyntavaṉ, moy puṉal porunal
tukil vaṇṇat tū nīrc cērppaṉ, vaṇ poḻil cūḻ
vaṇ kurukūrc caṭakōpaṉ
mukilvaṇṇaṉ aṭimēl coṉṉa col-mālai
āyirattu ip pattum vallār
mukil vaṇṇa vāṉattu imaiyavar cūḻa,
iruppar-pēriṉpa veḷḷattē. (VII–2–11)

Translation

Those that are well-versed in these songs ten,
Out of the choice thousand, composed in adoration
Of (Lord Raṅganātha) the cloud-hued Lord, by Caṭakōpaṉ
Of fertile Kurukūr on the bank of Porunal, the river sacred,
Who the cloud-hued Lord attained and was by His grace salved,
Will be by Celestials surrounded in High Heaven
And immersed in eternal joy remain.

Note

It is quite clear from this song that the entire hymnal, comprising a thousand songs, is in adoration of Lord Raṅganātha, enshrined in Tiruvaraṅkam (Śriraṅgam in Tamilnadu). The invocatory song (serial number 4), cited at the beginning of this hymnal, also highlights this fact. No doubt, particular decads have been dedicated to the Lord enshrined in other pilgrim centres as well. This is like portions from the main dedication, doled out like holy food first offered to Lord Raṅganātha being divided out and distributed among the minor deities in the chapels around, as Nampiḷḷai would put it.

Seventh Centum—Third Decad (VII-3)
Veḷḷaic curi caṅkoṭu

Preamble

The bliss of the union of the Nāyaki and Lord Raṅganātha having overflown its continents, the Lord hit upon a method whereby the enjoyment could be stabilised instead of the Nāyakī being swept off by its exuberance. He went to Tentiruppērēyil, near the Āḻvār's birth-place, game-hunting by way of relieving the distress of the people over there from the depredations of wild animals. The Nāyakī herself equipped Him with weapons, went with Him straight to the outer gate and bid Him farewell, wishing Him success. The Lord, mounted on Garuḍa, threw a bewitching parting glance at her. But then, she couldn't bear the separation and insisted that she would also go to Tentiruppērēyil to join her Lord, in the face of opposition from her mother, mates and other, kinsmen. The Nāyakī, bent upon going, suggests a via-media namely, if they are against her going alone, they could as well escort her to the place and leave her there with her Lord.

veḷḷaic curi caṅkoṭu āḻi ēnti,
tāmaraik kaṇṇaṉ eṉ neñciṉūṭē
puḷḷaik kaṭākiṉṟa āṟṟaik kāṇīr;
eṉ collic collukēṉ, aṉṉaimīrkāḷ?
veḷḷac cukam-avaṉ vīṟṟirunta-
vēta-oliyum, viḻā oliyum,
piḷḷaik kuḻā viḷaiyāṭṭu oliyum
aṟā-tiruppērēyil cērvaṉ nāṉē. (VII–3–1)

Translation

Ye, elders, for Tiruppērēyil I am indeed bound,
Where Vedic chantings, festivals and joyous shouts of children resound

With no break and the Lord, the very spate of bliss, stays;
How can I express the glorious vision that sways
My mind, the way the lotus- eyed Lord mounts the bird (Garuḍa),
Holding the spiral conch white and the discus in hand,
Which is what You people can't comprehend?

Notes

(i) The Nāyakī says, she can't describe her glorious mental vision adequately. What she has said in this song, touches but a fringe of the subject.

(ii) The undying noise of the children at play, is the unique feature of this pilgrim centre where the children play right in front of the temple. Eager to witness the children at play, the Deity would appear to have asked Garuḍa, installed right in front, to step aside without obstructing His view. Further, the festivals, with their usual fanfare, go on in this centre in an unbroken succession; it is said that Akrūra, the great devotee of Lord Kṛṣṇā, celebrated festivals in quick succession, after he came by the fabulous 'Syamantakamaṇi", a rare gem capable of generating fabulous wealth and here is Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī, the gem of a woman and there can be no dearth of festivals, wherever she goes.

nāṉak karuṅ kuḻal tōḻimīrkāḷ!
aṉṉaiyarkāḷ! ayal–cēriyīrkāḷ!
nāṉ it taṉi neñcam kākkamāṭṭēṉ;
eṉ vacam aṉṟu itu; irāppakal pōy,
tēṉ moytta pūmpoḻil taṇ paṇai cūḻ
tēṉ tiruppēreyil viṟṟirunta
vāṉap pirāṉ, maṇivaṇṇaṉ, kaṇṇaṉ
ceṅkaṉi vāyiṉ tiṟattatuvē. (VII–3–2)

Translation

Ye, mates with dark hair aromatic, ye, elders and neighbours,
Gone out of hand, My mind, I can't control; day and night,
Ahead of me it goes and lurks in the lips, like unto red fruit,

Of Kaṇṇaṉ, the heavenly Lord of sapphire hue, Who stays
In Teṉtiruppēreyil with lands fertile and flower gardens full of honey bees.

Notes

(i) The apparent incongruity of the mates appearing before the disconsolate Nāyakī with their hair nicely tended and perfumed, is reconciled by Nampiḷḷai, as follows:—

When the Nāyakī was in communion with the Lord, the flowers worn and discarded by Him would be picked up by the mates and worn by them even if they be mere shreds. The perfume therefrom is everlasting and it serves to sustain the Nāyakī, when the Lord is not beside her, as at present.

Alternately, it could be that the mates, bent upon rallying the Nāyakī round, should not themselves present a picture of dejection, with dishevelled hair. This is like Lakṣmaṇa having kept himself fit for serving Rāma, although the former's grief was by-no-means less than that of the latter over the abduction of Sītā.

(ii) The worldlings cannot be weaned away from sensual pleasures even as the Nāyakī cannot be weaned away from God-head. The God-bent mind of the Nāyakī has taken a leap ahead of her and got absorbed in Him completely. There is, therefore, no question of her being brought round by any one, not even the concerted action of the mates, mother and neighbours. Instead of the mind being subordinate to her, it is now the other way round. In short, the Nāyakī, enthralled by the Lord at Tiruppēreyil, is beyond recovery, from the point of view of the worldlings to whom she is lost altogether.

ceṉkaṉi vāyiṉ tiṟattatāyum,
ceñ cuṭar nīḷ muṭi taḻntatāyum,
caṅkoṭu cakkaram kaṇṭu ukantum,
tāmaraik kaṇkaḷukku aṟṟut tīrntum,

tiṅkaḷum nāḷum viḷā aṟāta
    teṉ tiruppēreyil vīṟṟirunta
nankaḷ pirāṉukku eṉ neñcam-tōḻī!
    nāṉum niṟaiyum iḻantatuvē. (VII–3–3)

Translation

Come, ye, mate, enthralled by the Lord's fruit-like lips red,
Enamoured of His tall resplendent crown, glowing red,
Enticed by His conch and discus and by His lotus eyes enslaved
My mind has unto the Lord, in Teṉtiruppēreyil enshrined,
With its fanfare of festivals unbroken, lost its reserve and refinement.

Notes

(i) The elders and neighbours having retreated from the scene, giving up the task of reclaiming the Nāyakī as hopeless, only the mate stays on, for further counselling. When she points out how unbecoming of the feminine rank and position the conduct of the Nāyakī is, the latter indicates in this song what indeed brought her to this pass. Actually, the Nāyakī's mind is getting exclusively absorbed in each one of these features of the Lord, even as He pervades all things, *in toto*, inside out. It is worth recalling, in this context the anecdote of Śaubhari. Great indeed was the spiritual prowess of sage Śoubhari. One day he went to a pond and noticed the fish playing about, huddled together. This fascinated the mind of the sage, steeped in renunciation till then, to lead a married life and rear up a large family, as in the fish pond. Learning that king Māndhāthā had fifty charming princesses, all unmarried, the sage asked the king to give him one of his daughters in marriage. The King evaded the issue by asking the sage to propose to the Princesses directly so that whosoever liked him could be taken as his bride. The sage knew the trick of the King quite well and, therefore, transformed himself into a charming young man whom the Princesses vied with one another to marry. The powerful sage took on fifty forms, on

account of his great tapasya, and married all of them. Similar is the intensity of the Āḻvār's longing to enjoy the Lord, in minute details, assuming different forms.

(ii) The Lord is enshrined in His Iconic (Worshippable) Form for the sake of us, the bound souls lingering in this world, even as His transcendent Form in Heaven is for the enjoyment of the 'Nityas' (Eternal heroes) and 'Muktas' (Released Souls) there, the 'Vyūha' (Operative Form) in the Milky ocean is for those akin to 'Muktas' and the Incarnate Forms are for the fortunate ones, who existed in those good olden times. This being the case, how could the Nāyakī keep away from the Lord in His 'Arca' (iconic) form at Tiruppēreyil?

iḻanta em māmaittiṟattup pōṉa eṉ neñciṉārum aṅkē oḻintār;
uḻantu iṉi, yaraikkoṇṭu eṉ, uṟākō?-ōtak kaṭal oli pōla, eṅkum
eḻunta nal vētattu oli niṉṟu, ōṅku teṉ tiruppēreyil vīṟṟirunta
muḻaṅku caṅkak kaiyaṉ māyattu āḻntēṉ-
    aṉṉaiyarkāḷ! eṉṉai eṉ muṉintē? (VII–3–4)

Translation

Ye, elders, that doyen, my mind, sallied forth to get me back
The lustre lost but there itself got badly stuck;
My mind, thus lost, who shall hence my companion be
And what shall I speak ? can you indeed be angry with me,
Seeing me immersed in the wondrous Lord Who wields
The resounding conch and stays in Teṉtiruppēreyil, the standing seat
Of Nalvētam, reverberating all over like the roaring sea?

Notes

(i) The mind is accorded an exalted position by the Nāyakī and referred to, with great respect, by reasons of its being God-bent and competitive in its exuberance for God-enjoyment. Discoloration set in because of the Nāyakī's extreme dejection, in her state of separation from the Lord. In a bold bid to restore to the Nāyakī her lost lustre, the mind went up to the Lord but alas!

it got stuck up at that end, completely absorbed in Him. The Nāyaki can hardly find any company other than her own mind for giving her the much-needed solace and, she feels worse off than Sītā in captivity, where she had atleast Tṛjaḍā and Saramai to console her. The Nāyakī is worse off than Sītā, in the sense that the former cannot court the company of anyone, neither the sense-buried Earthlings nor the egotistic tin-gods of the upper worlds, nor the Nityas, totallya bsorbed in God-enjoyment in the yonder heaven and least of all, the One who keeps aloof, having robbed her of her very garment.

(ii) She herself is now caught up in the compelling charm of the Lord at Teṉtiruppēreyil and she keeps musing over the Lord's fascinating features, all the time.

(iii) This pilgrim centre is said to be resonant with the sweet. chanting of Nalvētam (Sāmaveda)

muṉintu cakaṭam utaittu, māyap-
 pēy-mulai uṇṭu, marutu iṭai pōy,
kaṉinta viḷavukkuk kaṉṟu eṟinta
 kaṇṇa-pirāṉukku eṉ peṇmai tōṟṟēṉ-
muṉintu iṉi eṉ ceytīr, aṉṉaimīrkāḷ?
 muṉṉi avaṉ vantu vīṟṟirunta
kaṉinta poḻil tiruppēreyiṟkē,
 kālampeṟa, eṉṉaik kāṭṭumiṉē. (VII-3-5)

Translation

Ye, elders, what would you gain by rebuking me? lost is my feminity
Unto Kaṇṇaṉ, who the demon in the cart-wheel kicked in fury,
Sucked unto death the devil's breast and crawled 'twixt the twin trees,
Smote a calf against the wood-apple right on the tree
And slew both the demons; take me, with no more delay,
To Tiruppēreyil, full of gardens nice where my Lord stays.

Note

The Nāyakī is lost unto Kaṇṇaṉ (Lord Kṛṣṇa), in the sense that the bonds of feminine reserve and refinement have burst

in the face of her overwhelming, rather overpowering God-love. She advises the elders not to attempt the senseless task of putting up the bund after all the water has escaped down the sluices but to take her to Tiruppēreyil and leave her there where the Lord has come, in advance, to reclaim her. This they should do quickly when she is still alive, seeing her precarious condition.

kālam peṟa eṉṉaik kāṭṭumiṉkaḷ-
 kātal kaṭaliṉ mikap peritāl;
nīla mukil vaṇṇattu em perumāṉ
 niṟkum muṉṉē vantu; eṉ kaikkum eytāṉ;
ñālattu avaṉ vantu vīṟṟirunta-
 nāṉmaṟaiyāḷarum vēḷvi ōvā,
kōlac cenneṟkaḷ kavari vīcum,
 kūṭu puṉal-tiruppēreyiṟkē. (VII-3-6)

Translation

Ye, elders, it seems the cloud-hued Lord is in front of me
And yet beyond my reach; alas! my love is bigger than the sea,
Better take me quick to Tiruppēreyil, the place on Earth
Where the Lord has come to stay, full of mirth,
With water in plenty and paddy crops lovely, the centre great
Where vedic scholars zealously perform sacred rites.

Notes

(i) The elders point out that the Lord had just left on a hunting expedition with her consent and that the Nāyakī should not be so very impatient and that too, so soon. But then the Nāyakī's consuming passion is such that she can't brook separation from her Lord even for a short while. Her love is even more expansive than the ocean. That it is fast gathering momentum can be seen from the fact that her God-love, as set out in V-3-4, was of the size of the ocean and now it has grown bigger than the ocean. A little later, that is, in the eighth song of this decad itself, we find it surpassing the Earth, the seven peripheral oceans and the ultramundane regions, far beyond as well. In X-10-10,

it swells up to such astounding dimensions as to encompass the Supreme Lord Himself, the very object of love.

(ii) How could the Nāyakī contain the on-rush of God-love with such rapid strides, and keep it under restraint, as advised by the elders, the more so, when the glorious vision of the blue-hued Lord is right in front, and yet baffles external perception and sensibility? The only way this love could be nurtured is to take her to Tiruppēreyil, where the Lord is in His worshippable form, in all His heavenly splendour, surrounded by profound Vedic scholars, fertile fields and lovely gardens. Even as the paddy crops are sustained by the standing columns of water, the entire landscape of that holy centre sustains the Nāyaki.

pēr eyil cūḻ kaṭal teṉ ilaṅkai ceṟṟa pirāṉ vantu vīṟṟirunta
pēreyiṟkē pukku, eṉ neñcam nāṭi, pērttu vara eṅkum kāṇamāṭṭ
ārai iṉi iṅku uṭaiyam tōḻī? eṉ neñcam kūva vallārum illai; [ēṉ;
ārai iṉikkoṇṭu eṉ cātikkiṉṟatu? eṉ neñcam kaṇṭatuvē kaṇṭēṉē.
(VII-3-7)

Translation

My mind that went in quest of the Lord, who burnt down
Laṅkā, across the sea, surrounded by walls gigantic,
And now stays in Tiruppēreyil, hasn't come back;
Nobody else can keep me company nor is there any one
To restore my mind unto me; here's none who can perchance
Do unto me a good turn and my mind I shall follow hence.

Notes

(i) " Having seen in Tiruppēreyil, the victorious Lord who vanquished that felon, Rāvaṇa ", says the Nāyakī unto the mate, " it is no wonder, my mind doesn't come back to me. Having lost such a great companion, there is hardly any point in my staying behind, as there is none who can take his place. Even you are in a state of extreme debility. It is, therefore, but meet that I follow suit and join my mind right where it has gone ". Did not Śrī Rāma say, in Uttara Rāmāyaṇa, when he set out for the Celestium after His long stay in this abode, that He was going the way Lakṣmaṇa had gone a little earlier? Lakṣmaṇa was the first to go and Śrī Rāma went a little later.

Śrī Nampiḷḷai would say that Hanumān visited even the inpenetrable Laṅkā, remote and inaccessible, from where none could return safely and came back with a message from Sītā but the Nāyakī's mind could not get back from near-by Tiruppēreyil. And now, instead of sending a message to God, she has to send one to her mind. There is none to carry the message either. There is thus no remedy except her going there herself.

(ii) The Lord in Tiruppēreyil is said to be fresh from His victory over Rāvaṇa. But then, that was the time when Śrī Rāma's mind was vitiated by feelings of suspicion and anger, leading to His acrimonious address to Sītā, in such harsh terms as:

" My love is fled, for on thy fame
Lies the dark blot of sin and shame;
And thou art hateful as the light
That flashes in the injured sight ".

Śrī Āḷavandār (Saint Yāmunācārya), the great preceptor, was greatly piqued by this unreasonable accusation of the Mother and he said: " Surely, it isn't my radiant Mother's light that hurts but Rāma's sore eye that is hurt. The mote is indeed in Rāma's eye; Sītā is absolutely pure, bright like the pure flame that appears tainted owing to dark suspicion obscuring Rāma's heart ".

kaṇṭatuvē koṇṭu ellārum kūṭi,
kārk kaṭal vaṇṇaṉōṭu eṉtiṟattuk
koṇṭu, alar tūṟṟiṟṟu; atu mutalāk
koṇṭa eṉ kātal uraikkil, tōḻī!

maṉ tiṇi ñālamum, ēḻ kaṭalum,
nīḷ vicumpum kaḻiyap peritāl;
teṉ tirai cūḻntu avaṉ vīṟṟirunta
teṉ tiruppēreyil cērvaṉ-ceṉṟē. (VII–3–8)

Translation

My mate, ever since the elders began to complain,
Seeing the outer change in me, about my union
With the Lord of oceanic hue, my love unto Him has swollen
Beyond the Earth, its peripheral oceans seven
And the ultra mundane regions afar; so then,
My Lord at Tiruppēreyil I have to go and join.

Note

The people around could hardly know the depth of the God-love swelling up the Nāyakī's bosom but they could, in a way, notice it from the words she uttered, her lamentation and other external changes in her complexion, behaviour etc. Then, they started rebuking her but their remonstration produced the opposite effect, virtually serving as the rich manure for the speedy cultivation of her God-love. And now, it has grown to the astounding dimensions, set out in this song (See also the notes under V-3-4), VII-3-6 and X-10-10).

cērvaṉ ceṉṟu-eṉṉuṭait tōḻimīrkāḷ!
aṉṉaiyarkāḷ! eṉṉait tēṟṟa vēṇṭā;
nīrkaḷ uraikkiṉṟatu eṉ itaṟku?
neñcum niṟaivum eṉakku iṅku illai;
kārvaṇṇaṉ kārk kaṭal ñālam uṇṭa
kaṇṇa-pirāṉ vantu vīṟṟirunta-
ēr vaḷa oṇ kaḻaṉip paḻaṉa-
teṉ tiruppēreyil māṉakarē. (VII–3–9)

Translation

Ye, mates and elders, make no attempt to reclaim me,
There's hardly anything you can say, gone is my mind
And my modesty too, and now for Tiruppēreyil am I bound,

With its fields fertile, fed with water in plenty,
Where resides Kaṇṇaṉ, my Lord of blue tint,
Who the Sea-bound worlds did gulp.

Note

The Nāyakī insists upon going to Tiruppēreyil, as the mates and elders counselled her patience and infused in her hopes of an early return of her Beloved Lord. The Nāyakī is, however, in no mood to listen to such hollow inducements. As a matter of fact, stripped of her mind, which has preceded her in its flight to the Lord, she can hardly be receptive to all that they say. At any rate, she did not have that type of mind, that would respond to their advice. Further, she stands enthralled by the exquisite charm of the blue-hued Lord, the great Redeemer.

nakaramum, nāṭum, piṟavum tērvēṉ;
nāṇ eṉakku illai, eṉ tōḻimīrkāḷ!
cikara maṇi neṭu māṭam nīṭu
teṉ tiruppēreyil vīṟṟirunta
makara neṭuṅkuḻaik kātaṉ, māyaṉ,
nūṟṟuvarai aṉṟu maṅka nūṟṟa
nikar il mukilvaṇṇaṉ, nēmiyāṉ, eṉ
neñcam kavarntu eṉai ūḻiyāṉē? (VII–3–10)

Translation

My mates, I am not in the least shy to go forward
To cities and villages in quest of those that look down
Upon my love unto Makaraneṭuṅkuḻaikkātaṉ, the peerless
Lord, cloud-hued,
With discus in hand, of wondrous deeds, who got slain
The hundred Kaurav brothers and now resides in Tiruppēreyil,
The ancient city with its turrets tall and stately castles,
Who since ages long did my heart steal.

Notes

(i) The mates pointed out that the Nāyakī would, by darting forth in the manner repeatedly proposed by her, only

invite public ridicule and criticism of her conduct. The Nāyakī, however, retorts that she would go forward in search of these very persons, in hall and hamlet, as it would indeed gladden her heart to be told about her union with Lord, Makarabhūṣaṇa (whose ears are bedecked with pearls), especially in her present state of separation from Him.

(ii) Even as the Lord manoeuvred, by stages, to get the hundred Kaurava brothers slain, He seems to have planned long, long back to steal away the Nāyakī's heart.

ūḻitōṟu ūḻi, uruvum pērum
ceykaiyum vēṟavaṉ, vaiyam kākkum
āḻi nīr vaṇṇaṉai, accutaṉai,
aṇi kurukūrc caṭakōpaṉ coṉṉa
kēḻ il antāti ōr āyirattuḷ
ivai tiruppēreyil mēya pattum
āḻi aṅkaiyaṉai ētta vallār
avar aṭimaittiṟattu āḻiyārē. (VII–3–11)

Translation

Those that adore the Lord, with conch and discus fine,
By chanting this decad which unto the Deity at Tiruppēreyil pertains,
Out of the thousand peerless songs composed by Caṭakōpaṉ
Of lovely Kurukūr, extolling Accutaṉ, the sea-hued Lord, Who takes on
Different names and forms in different ages, to carry on
His steadfast work of universal protection,
Will in His eternal service be blessed to remain.

Note

The end-stanza brings out that those well-versed in these ten songs, will be blessed with the great good fortune of rendering eternal service unto the Lord, like unto His discus, ever alert and dutiful.

Seventh Centum—Fourth Decad (VII-4)
(Āḻi eḻa)

Preamble

Just when the Nāyakī was attempting to go to Tiruppēreyil where the Lord had gone for game-hunting, He returned victorious, like Śrī Rāma back home from exile, after vanquishing Rāvaṇa and his formidable horde of Rākṣasas. It may be recalled that Sītā locked Śrī Rāma in her sweet embrace by way of nursing wounds on His person after His remarkable victory over Kara, Dhūṣaṇa, Tṛśiras and the fourteen thousand Rākṣasas under them, singlehanded and in an amazingly short space of time. Even so, Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī, exceedingly jubilant over the Lord's quick return from His victorious hunting expedition, gets locked up in His sweet embrace, by way of relieving His fatigue. In her festive mood, she also goes on recounting the Lord's wondrous deeds and benefaction, vast and varied, as set out in this decad, exclaiming, "What a marvel!" "what a wonder!" and so on.

(Āṟāyirappaṭi Commentary)

āḻi eḻa, caṅkum villum eḻa, ticai
vāḻi eḻa, taṇṭum vāḷum eḻa, aṇṭam
mōḻai eḻa, muṭi pātam eḻa, appaṉ
ūḻi eḻa-ulakam koṇṭavāṟē! (VII–4–1)

Translation

Oh, how wonderful! the way the Benefactor great spanned the worlds,
The discus, first to grow tall like unto the Lord,
Was by the conch, bow, mace and sword followed;
Benedictory shouts from all directions went up,
The massive globe got pierced and bubbling came up
Peripheral waters, the Lord's crown and feet moving up,
And for Devas, the good days showed themselves up.

Note

The breath-taking expansion of the Lord as Tṛvikrama, spanning the entire Universe, up and below, is mentioned first. When the King embarks on a mighty undertaking,

his immediate attendants vie with each other in exhibiting their eagerness to ensure its successful achievement. When Rāma set out on exile, Lakṣmaṇa was the first to step forward to accompany Him. Likewise, when the Lord started expanding upward, His discus, the principal weapon, was the first to expand, the other weapons following suit. In Śrī Nampiḷḷai's unique way of putting things, the discus coolly stuck to the Lord's hand so that when the Lord rose high up, it could automatically go up; actually, the amazing rapidity with which the Lord rose up made the discus sceptical of keeping pace with the Lord through its own effort and hence this device. The luminous discus shone with extra brilliance while the conch bellowed forth, striking terror in the hearts of the ungodly. The discus has always had a dominant role to play in all the Avatāras of the Lord. During His advent as Rāma, the aura of the discus permeated the bow, the same aura charged itself into the bent tooth, long and protruding, of the great Boar (varāha), into Narasimha's nails and Paraśu Rāma's axe. It was the discus that spoilt the eye of Śukrācārya, the high priest of the Asuras, assuming the shape of the twisted grass in Vāmana's finger. Ever sharp, the alert discus would dart forth from the Lord's hand and instantly hit the target, the Lord wishes to attack, the moment He thinks of it. (śudarśana śatakam)

In this marvellous expansion, the Lord's crown and feet seemed to rise together. With the ascent of the Lord and His appendages, in this manner, the good days were also coming up for the down-trodden Devas. The entire scene is presented by the Āḻvār, as if it was a contemporaneous event televised.

āṟu malaikku etirntu ōṭum oli, aravu
ūṟu culāy malai tēykkum oli, kaṭal
māṟu cuḻanṟu aḻaikkinṟa oli-appaṉ
cāṟupaṭa, amutam koṇṭa nānṟē! (VII-4-2)

Translation

During the festive days when the great Sire for Devas gave
The nectar from the ocean churned, the great noise came
Of rivers bound for the ocean running back to the mountains,
Of the mighty snake rustling round the gigantic mountain
And of the oceanic water whirling round and round.

Note

When the momentous churning of the Milk-ocean took place, so great was the upheaval of the ocean that the rivers bound for the ocean were repulsed so fast that they had to swirl back to the mountains whence they sprang. And then, there was the mighty serpent, Vāsukī functioning as the rope churning the great mountain, making all the noise that the tremendous friction could produce; and to cap it all was the roaring of the oceanic water whirling with great momentum. What an astounding scene indeed! It is even more astonishing that the Āḻvār could visualise it in such graphic details at this distance of time. As already mentioned elsewhere, the Lord assumed multifarious roles in this breath-taking project.

nānṟila ēḻ maṇṇum tāṉattavē; piṉṉum,
nānṟila ēḻ malai tāṉattavē; piṉṉum,
nānṟila ēḻ kaṭal tāṉattavē- appaṉ
ūṉṟi, iṭantu, eyiṟṟil koṇṭa nāḷē. (VII-4-3)

Translation

Oh, what a wonder! when the Lord pulled the Earth out
With His tooth unique from under the waters deep,
The islands seven didn't from erstwhile positions slip,
The mountains seven were as they had been and didn't tilt,
And again, the oceans seven didn't burst and were *in tact*.

Note

The Lord incarnated as the Great Boar, slew the demon Hiranyākṣa (the golden-eyed) in a pitched battle, and forked the Earth, hidden by him under the waters, with His unique tooth, long and portruding. When the Lord put

the Earth back in position, all its contents, namely. the seven islands, the seven mountains and seven oceans were quite *in tact*, without undergoing any change whatever. This is indeed characteristic of the Omnipotent Lord. The inhabitants also continued to jog on as before. running after food and raiment, unmindful of the herculean tasks performed by the Lord. This is yet another wonder indeed!

nāḷum eḷa, nilam nīrum eḷa, viṇṇum
kōḷum eḷa, eri kālum eḷa, malai
tāḷum eḷa, cuṭar-taṉum eḷa, appaṉ-
ūḷi eḷa ulakam uṇṭa ūṇē! (VII-4-4)

Translation

Oh, how wonderful! the Lord did during deluge sustain
In His stomach which with noise great sucked in
The worlds seven, the sky and the planets tumbling down,
Land and water got uprooted and Time ceased to function,
The wind and fire, the mountains seven,
The stars and other luminaries fell off their position.

Note

This song brings out the extraordinary situation that prevailed at the time of the deluge when all the elements, Sky and Earth, the Sun, Stars and other luminous bodies fell from their respective positions and moved into the Lord's stomach, literally sucked in, to avoid being swept off. When the Sun, the chief indicater of time and its numerous components got dislodged, Time automatically ceased to function. Here then is a state of terrible impasse but all things are quite safe inside the Lord's stomach. Oh, what a miracle!

ūṉuṭai mallar tatarnta oli, maṉṉar
āṉ uṭaic cēṉai naṭuṅkum oli, viṇṇuḷ
ēṉ uṭait tēvar veḷippaṭṭa oli-appaṉ
kāṇuṭaip pāratam kai aṟai pōḻtē! (VII-4-5)

Translation

When (Kṛṣṇa) my Sire did the armies assemble
For the wondrous battle of Bhārata where did scream and tremble

Kings and warriors great and wrestlers fat and strong, fell,
Clashing with noise great and the exalted Celestials,
Gathered in outer space, did witn great wonder bubble.

Note

On seeing Lord Kṛṣṇa, the Divine Charioteer, ranged on the side of the Pāṇḍavas, Kings and Warriers of great prowess, arrayed opposite, screamed and trembled. The exalted Celestials came in their strength and watched from above, bubbling with reverent admiration, the wondrous battle down below, whose strategy was directed by the Lord at every turn, culminating in the victory of the Pāṇḍavas.

pōḻtu melinta puṉ cekkaril vāṉ, ticai
cūḻum, eḻuntu utirap puṉalā, malai
kīḻtu, piḷanta ciṅkam ottatāl-appaṉ
āḷ tuyar ceytu, acuraraik kollumāṟē! (VII-4-6)

Translation

Oh, what a wonder! the way the demon (Hiraṇya) was by my Sire slain;
Right at dusk, like a lion standing over a mountain lain
Down below and cleaving it, splashing blood in all directions
And high up in the sky, turning it all crimson.

Note

Oh, what a thrilling spectacle it was, the way Narasimham slew Hiraṇya, like unto one mountain cleaving another lain, down below, blood flooding all over, high and low! Isn't it strange that the blood should flow, in all directions, including the sky, like water flooding low-lying areas?

māṟu niraittu iraikkum caraṅkaḷ iṉa
nūṟu piṇam malaipōl purala, kaṭal
āṟu maṭuttu utirap puṉalā-appaṉ
nīṟupaṭa, ilaṅkai ceṟṟa nēṟē! (VII-4-7)

Translation

Hundreds of corpses (of the Rākṣasas) were felled down
Like mountains huge, by noisy arrows darting in succession,
Filling with blood the ocean and thence into the rivers overflown,
This is how the great Sire (Rāma) did Laṅkā burn down.

Note

Oh, what a grand imagery! The blood of the Rākṣasas, rolling down dead in large numbers, fills the ocean and overflows into the rivers pushing the waters back. Lord Rāma's arrows reduced Rāvaṇa's Laṅka to ashes, a veritable grave-yard. The arrows sped in different directions, clashing with each other, roaring like the sea.

nērcarintāṉ koṭik kōḻi koṇṭāṉ; piṉṉum
nērcarintāṉ eriyum aṉalōṉ; piṉṉum,
nērcarintāṉ mukkaṇ-mūrtti kaṇṭir-appaṉ
nērcari vāṇaṉ tiṇtōḷ koṇṭa aṉṟē! (VII-4-8)

Translation

When Kṛṣṇa, my Sire, did chop off the mighty arms
Of the retreating vāṇaṉ the one with peacock banner
Had to give way and so did the one (Agni) that beams,
The triple-eyed (Rudra) too beat a retreat, in like manner.

Note

Kṛṣṇa's encounter with Vāṇaṉ (Bāṇāsura) and his allies has already been set out, in detail, in the notes under III-10-4. Subrahmaṇya, Son of Śiva, is referred to here as the one with peacock banner. Agni, the fire-god, flaunted all his fortynine facets, in vain; he had to cut a sorry figure, like his compatriots, before Lord Kṛṣṇā.

aṉṟu maṇ, nīr, eri, kāl, viṇ malai mutal;
aṉṟu cuṭar iraṇṭu, piṟavum; piṉṉum
aṉṟu maḻai, uyir, tēvum, maṟṟum-appaṉ
aṉṟu mutal ulakam ceytatumē! (VII-4-9)

Translation

When the Lord first created the worlds,
The elements five, the mountains and other things were ushered,
All at once and so were the Sun, Moon and Stars,
That very moment came up the clouds that shower
Rains and the lives they sustain, all things still and mobile,
And the minor deities, oh, what a marvel!

Note

This song could refer either to the intial creation of the worlds with their diverse contents as one of His great achievements or be treated as a follow-up of the preceding song, dealing with the subjugation of Bāṇāsura by Lord Kṛṣṇa. The Lord's creation became worth its while, only when He subdued Bāṇāsura and quelled his hauteur galore, crop-protection does indeed form an integral part of crop-cultivation.

mēy nirai kīḻ puka, mā puraḷa, cuṉai
vāy niṟai nīr piḷiṟic coriya, iṉa
ā-niraipāṭi aṅkē oṭuṅka-appaṉ
tī maḻai kāttu, kuṉṟam eṭuttāṉē (VII-4-10)

Translation

When (Kṛṣṇa) my Sire, held the umbrella of a mountain
And warded off (Indra's) rain of destruction,
The whole of Āyppāṭi, the town fertile, remained under its protection,
The grazing cattle just moved aside and carried on,
The beasts tumbled as the mount was held upside down
And water from tanks, full to the brim, came gushing down.

Note

Here is a short and sweet picture, graphic enough, of Lord Kṛṣṇa's mountain-lifting to protect a whole township and its cattle from the fury of Indra, which visited on them through a heavy down-pour of revengeful rains for a whole week. While the cattle grazed on undisturbed, moving a

little down on the mountain slopes, the wild animals, caught unawares, tumbled down, as Śrī Kṛṣṇa held Mount Govardan upside down, like holding an umbrella. Again, the tanks on the mountain slopes, full to the brim, got inverted and the waters discharged therefrom came down with roaring noise, like unto rain-fall from numerous belts, the phenomenon of a multiplicity of rains raised in the process of shielding the township from a single rain visited by the irate Indra. How magnanimous indeed of the Lord to have patiently held aloft a mountain for a whole week and spared Indra, a votary of His (unlike the inimical Asuras), despite the wrong done by him!

kuṉṟam eṭutta pirāṉ aṭiyāroṭum
oṉṟi niṉṟa caṭakōpaṉ uraiceyal
naṉṟi puṉainta ōr āyirattuḷ ivai
veṉṟi tarum-pattum mēvik kaṟpārkkē. (VII-4-11)

Translation

Success in many ways will these ten beneficent songs confer
On those that learn them, out of the thousand composed
By Caṭakōpaṉ who did unto the devotees adhere
Of the Benefactor great, Who aloft did mount Govardan hold.

Note

The Āḷvār feels as if he is one of those who took shelter under mount Govardan, when Lord Kṛṣṇa held it aloft. It could also be interpreted as his joining the rank and file of the Śrī Vaiṣṇavas, who have sought refuge at the Lord's feet, scared of the worldly life, like unto those in the pastoral village, who took shelter under Govardan. As Nampiḷḷai puts it, the Āḷvār feels drawn towards the Lord's remarkable simplicity in holding aloft Govardan for a whole week and His exquisite charm in that position. And so, he gives vent to his Joy by mentally mingling with those who were then under the Lord's protective umbrella. Surely, the chanters of this decad which sets out, one by one, the Lord's victorious achivements, will be crowned with success in all their undertakings.

Seventh Centum—Fifth Decad (VII-5)
(Kaṟpār-irama-pirāṉai)

Preamble

The Āḷvār, who revelled in the last decad, recounting some of the Lord's glorious deeds, cites some more achievements of the Lord's glorious deeds, cites some more achievements of the Lord in this decad, much to his own delectation. At the same time, he could not help wondering how the worldlings, whose birthright it is to share this enjoyment, kept aloof and he even felt vexed with them for their callous indifference. What a pity! Oblivious of the huge treasure of gold, buried within inches right in the centre courtyard of their houses, these folks struggle elsewhere with swollen feet in search of fleeting wealth of no consequence.

kaṟpār irāma-pirāṉai allāl, maṟṟum kaṟparō-
puḷ pā mutalā, pul eṟumpu āti oṉṟu iṉṟivē,
nal-pāl ayōttiyil vāḻum caràcaram muṟṟavum,
nal-pālukku uyttaṉaṉ-nāṉmukaṉār peṟṟa nāṭṭuḷē? (VII-5-1)

Translation

Will those in quest of Knowledge seek to Know any but Irāmapirāṉ
Who did instil love great for Him even in the smallest ant
And tiny grass in Ayōtti, the blessed city (with God-love rampant),
Things still and mobile, with no effort on their part,
Of all the places in this world, created by Nāṉmukaṉ?

Notes

(i) When *Irāmapirāṉ* (Śrī Rāma) went into exile, even inanimate things got choked with grief, the trees withered away, the tanks and rivers boiled up to such an extent that none could go near them. And when He returned to Ayodhyā at the end of His exile, the trees started yielding fruits out of season, the orchards were all in full blossom, betokening the exuberance of their joy over the Lord's home-coming. Such was the great

spell of love cast upon all things, still and mobile, and all creatures in the blessed Kingdom of Ayodhā, by Lord Rāma! It has to be noted that this God-love of amazing magnitude was generated in them by the Lord's spontaneous grace, without any effort on their part such as pursuing the paths of discipline laid down by the Śastras for cultivationg it. This aspect has been dwelt upon in aphorism 105 of 'Ācārya Hṛdayam' with the Author's characteristic profundity. Even trees and animals were spell-bound, when the Lord, during His next Avtāra as Kṛṣṇa, produced sweet strains from His magic flute.

(ii) In his 'Dramiḍopaniṣad tātparya Ratnāvali' Śrī Vedānta Deśika, however, interprets this song, as referring to final emancipation of all things and beings in Ayodhya, due solely to Śrī Rāma's voluntary grace. 'Śākethe muktidhānāt". All the other glossators, except the author of the twleve thousand grantha commentary, hold that this song highlights Lord Rāma's extraordinary grace in investing the creatures in Ayodhyā with an abundance of God-love, matching with that of the denizens in the High Heaven. Nāṉmukaṉ (Brahmā) is the demi-urge nominated by the Supreme Lord for carrying out the function of creation. Even so, in the worlds created by him there was just one place known as Ayodhyā where all creatures, including the tiniest of beings and things like the ants and grass, were soaked exclusively in love for Lord Rāma, instead of being dependent on Brahmā, the ostensible Creator. Among the living creatures, the ant is the smallest and the grass is the tiniest among things, still and immobile. Mention of these two in this song, goes to emphasise that it is not one's spiritual learning and deep erudition that secure the fina lgoal of 'Mokṣa' but the Lord's sweet to spontaneous grace and 'apratiṣedha' or non-resistance the influx of His grace, on the part of the beneficiaries. Of all places within the ambit of creation of that functionary, known as Brahmā, there is just one, called Ayodhyā where all things and beings from the highest

to the lowest, subsist on God-love a passionate love for Śrī Rāma, in total replacement of the normal source of sustenance, namely, food. And, therefore, can one long to know of any but Lord Rāma who instilled such love out of His sweet, spontaneous grace?

(iii) Among our Pūrvācāryas (Great Preceptors), Kūrattāḻvāṉ felt that the perfections and graces of Godship were complete in His incarnation as Rāma, eclipsing the glories of all the other Avatāras of the Lord. Bhaṭṭārya, the illustrious son of the illustrious father, had also a distinct predilection for Rāmāvatāra, before whom all the other Avatāras paled into insignificance, according to him. One day, he reacted sharply to the observation made by one Ciriāttāṉ that Lord Rāma did not display the virtue of condescension (S..ulabhya) to the remarkable extent displayed by Lord Kṛṣṇa by running an errand, on behalf of the Pāṇḍavas like unto a carrier-pigeon. Bhaṭṭārya stoutly defended his own position, saying: "It is not so; Rāma would have certainly been prepared to go as a messenger but there was none to bid him to carry any message".

nāṭṭil piṟantavar nāraṇaṟku āḷ aṉṟi, āvarō—
nāṭṭil piṟantu, paṭātaṉa paṭṭu, maṉicarkkāy,
nāṭṭai naliyum arakkarai nāṭit taṭintiṭṭu,
nāṭṭai aḷittu, uyyac ceytu, naṭantamai kēṭṭumē? (VII–5–2)

Translation

Will those that to the land belong (where reigns supreme
The Lord's glory), be the vassal of any one but (Him) Nāraṇar
Even after knowing how He unto this wicked land came
And suffered miseries untold for the sake of the humans,
Tormented by the Rākṣasas, how He sought and routed them,
Restoring peace and piety in the land and went back to the
Celestium?

Notes

(i) Śrī Rāma stayed in this land for eleven thousand years although He slew Rāvaṇa'and vanquished the monstrous

hordes under him in His thirty-eighth year itself. During this long period, the Kingdom of Ayodhyā became saturated with love for Him and the subjects looked upon Him as their sole sustainer. No wonder, when He went back to the Celestium, He took them all with Him.

(ii) In the text of this song, Rāma is referred to as Nārāyaṇa (Nāraṇaṉ) being an incarnation of the latter. After the overthrow of Rāvaṇa, Brahmā, Rudra and other Celestials assembled in outer space and sang Śrī Rāma's praise in a chorus, when they said 'Bhavān Nārāyaṇo Devaḥ' etc. Brahmā requested Rāma to get back to the Celestium just then, but Rudra referred to by Vālmīki, as "Ṣaḍartha nayana Śrīmān" pleaded that He should deign to get back to Ayodhyā and restore happiness to His mothers, brothers and the subjects pining for Him and nurture them with His loving grace.

(iii) Wasn't it His condescending love and deep concern for the sorrowing mortals, down below, sunk in deep distress, that made Him come down to this hideous land which is abhorred even by us, mortals bound by Karma, and stay in the mother's womb for full twelve months, a couple of months more than we do? And what more? No human ever suffered like Him, His separation from Sītā, His beloved Consort, like unto the Soul remaining on one side of the ocean and the body, on the other, loss of jaṭāyu, the vulture King, extremely dear unto Him etc., etc., and yet these very men for whom He underwent all the harrowing hardships are so ungrateful as to criticise and find fault with Him at this distance of time. Even the Devas, who would not deign to step on to this loathsmoe soil and receive the libations offered to them by we men and over here, only from a distance, had no compunction while requesting the Lord to come down to Earth and slay Rāvaṇa, King of Laṅkā and rout the city. So very selfish, these Devas are.

kēṭpārkaḷ kēcavaṉ kīrtti allāl, maṟṟum kēṭparō-
kēṭpār cevi cuṭu kīḻmai vacaivukaḷē vaiyum
cēṉpāl paḻam pakaivaṉ, cicupālaṉ, tiruvaṭi
tāḷ-pāl aṭainta taṉmai aṟivārai aṟintumē? (VII–5–3)

Translation

Will those that yearn to listen to things great
Listen to aught but the glory of Kēcavaṉ from those
That know how He got restored unto His feet
Even Śiśupāla, the age-long enemy inveterate, who railed abuses
On Him, so vile and mean, that even those who longed
To hear Him maligned found them unsavoury and blistering?

Note

What is there to hear but the glory of the magnanimous Lord Kṛṣṇa (Keśava) who salved even the malicious Śiśupāla, His sworn enemy, whose sole occupation it was to vituperate Him in the meanest terms, from those who have already got to know about it? Even while abusing, Śiśupāla chose Lord Kṛṣṇa as his target, keeping Him in view and mentioning His name all the time, though in bad light. The felon did so not only in one birth but in every one of his many births. And what about the intensity of his hatred for the Lord? Even those, who longed to hear the Lord maligned and hired out persons for this job, could not stand the blistering invectives of Śiśupāla. The merciful Lord perhaps took this as yet another form of recital of His names, 'Nāma Saṅkīrtana' and salved the age-long offender! So then, even enmity to God is preferred to friendship with Satan, seeing that Śiśupāla could obtain salvation, although he was a staunch hater of Lord Kṛṣṇa, reciting His holy names by way of malicious indictment, though coming face to face with His bejewelled Person, *the great fortune of a great enemy*! And what to say of the infiniteness of His grace, much beyond the competence of we mortals to conjecture! The Lord's grace is all the more pronounced, seeing that Śiśupāla had, on his part, not even the remotest wish (arthitva) for salvation and it is incredible that he could ever attain it.

taṉmai aṟipavar tām avaṟku āḷ aṉṟi, āvarō-
paṉmaip paṭar poruḷ ātum il pāḷ neṭum kālattu,
naṉmaip puṉal paṇṇi, nāṉmukaṉaip paṇṇi, taṉṉuḷḷē
toṉmai mayakkiya tōṟṟiya cūḻalkaḷ cintitīē? (VII–5–4)

Translation

Will those, that meditate on the grace galore of the Lord,
Become the vassals of any but Him who put back the worlds
In positions, as of old, creating the beneficent water first,
And Brahmā, the four-headed, next, finding all things lost
For a whole eternity, in a state of veritable naught,
When one thing could not from another be told, in His stomach caught?

Note

We can't but belong to the Supreme, Lord, our Sole Master, the first cause of all things, who created the worlds of differences, with their assortments as Dev. s, humans, birds and beasts, plants and things, still and mobile. It was indeed His grace galore that made Him sustain in His stomach all the worlds with their varied contents, without their being swept off, during the Great deluge (Mahāpralaya), a state of virtual non-existece or nothingness, pending the restoration of the old order of things in due course when He put them back in position. Is there any need then to specifically state that we can't but belong to Him, our creator?

cūḻalkaḷ cintikkil, māyaṉ kaḻal aṉṟi, cūḻvarō-
āḻap perum puṉal-taṉṉuḷ aḻuntiya ñālattait
tāḻap paṭāmal, taṉpāl oru kōṭṭiṭait tāṉ koṇṭa
kēḻal tiru uru āyiṟṟuk kēṭṭum, uṇarntumē? (VII–5–5)

Translation

Will those who seek the means to achieve their ends
Lean on aught but the feet of the wondrous Lord,
Having (from sages) heard and pondered how He pulled

The Earth out from the depth of the water vast,
As the Great Boar, on His tooth unique, well in tact?

Note

Once we get to know the Lord's grace galore and ponder over it, the manner in which He created the worlds and later, preserved them from being swept off by the deep waters of the Deluge, does it not behove us to look upon Him as our Sole Refuge? When He forked the Earth out, effortlessly on His long tusk, bent and protruding, it looked like a blue gem, at one end of the tooth. It was indeed the Lord's extra-ordinary grace that induced Him to assume a Form out of all proportion to the actual needs, like unto a generous host out to feed a bare forty persons, cooking for a hundred.

kēṭṭum uṇarntavar kēcavaṟku āḷ aṉṟi, āvarō-
vāṭṭam ilā vaṇ kai māvali vātikka, vātippuṇṭu,
īṭṭam koḷ tēvarkaḷ ceṉṟu irantārkku iṭar nīkkiya
kōṭṭu aṅkai vāmaṉaṉ āy, ceyta kūttukkaḷ kaṇṭumē? (VII–5–6)

Translation

The Devās, tormented by Māvali, the donor great with devilish pride filled,
Did the Lord entreat to rid them of their pain extreme;
Wonders He then performed and the donor's pride He quelled,
As Vāmaṉaṉ, with outstretched arms, seeking the queer kind of alms;
Having all these from the great sages heard
And pondered over, how can one submit to any but Kēcavaṉ, my Lord?

Note

If Māvali (Mahābali) was a peerless donor, the Lord too went to him as a peerless Seeker of alms! It was Bali's infliction of unbearable miseries on the Devas, big and small, which made the otherwise discordant team (cutting at each other's throat, one chopping the head of another, like unto the land-lords envious of the greatness of one another) combine together and appeal at the feet of Lord Mahāviṣṇu.

kaṇṭum, teḻintum kaṟṟār kaṇṇaṟku āḷ aṉṟi, āvarō-
vaṇṭu uṉ malart toṅkal markkaṇṭēyaṉukku vāḻum nāḷ
iṇṭaic caṭaimuṭi īcaṉ uṭaṉkoṇṭu ucāc cella,
koṇṭu aṅku, taṉṉoṭum koṇṭu, uṭaṉ ceṉṟatu uṇarntumē? (VII–5–7)

Translation

Ican, with matted locks pronounced, led the little lad,
Mārkaṇṭēyaṉ, with lovely garland bedecked, unto the Lord,
Who blessed the youngster with long life and unto His fold
Admitted him; having heard all these by the great sages told,
Will those that ponder over the Lord's grace galore
Adore any but Kaṇṇaṉ, with their vision clear?

Note

In the preceding song, Indra and other Devas who sought refuge in the Lord, were blessed by Him. But that is nothing when compared with His shedding grace on Mārkaṇṭēya, a votary of Śiva. Here then is yet another poof of the Lord's infinite grace. As regards Mārkaṇṭēyā's episode and the relative role of Śiva and Mahāviṣṇu in redeeming that great initial votary of Śiva, see the elaborate notes under IV-10-8.

cella uṇarntavar celvaṉ-taṉ cīr aṉṟi, kaṟparō-
ellai ilāta perum tavattāl pala cey miṟai,
allal amararaic ceyyum iraṇiyaṉ ākattai,
mallal ari uru āy, ceyta māyam aṟintumē? (VII–5–8)

Translation

Will those with knowledge, full and perfect,
Learn aught but the glory great of the Lord affluent,
Knowing how, as the gigantic Ari , He tore apart
The body of Iraṇiyaṉ, the demon who thro' penance immense
Acquired enormous strength and did the Devās tease and torment?

Notes

(i) The knowledgeable persons, whose thoughts can reach the farthest lengths, will not stop short of revelling in the Supreme Lord's glory, His auspicious traits and wondrous deeds.

(ii) Hiraṇya (Iraṇiyaṉ) was very formidable indeed, armed with many a boon acquired by Him, by dint of the severest penance imaginable. But he paled into insignificance before the mighty Ari (Narasimha) of enormous size like unto the water collected in the hoof-mark of the cow (the shallow depression on the ground caused by the hoof of the animal) vis-a-vis the oceanic waters. Could one's mind be turned away from a Lord shedding such astounding grace on His devotees?

māyam aṟipavar māyavaṟku āḷ aṉṟi, āvarō-
tāyam ceṟum oru nūṟṟuvar maṅka, ōr aivarkku āy,
tēcam aṟiya ōr cāratiyāyc ceṉṟu, cēṉaiyai
nācam ceytiṭṭu, naṭanta nal vārttai aṟintumē? (VII–5–9)

Translation

Will those well-versed with the wondrous Lord's exploits magnificent
Ever subserve any but Him, so loving and munificent,
Knowing how He became world-famous as the peerless charioteer,
For the sake of the illustrious five to whom He did cater,
Annihilating their hundred coparceners unfriendly and did the armies shatter
And the heartening word that He went to the Celestium thereafter?

Note

Oh, what an amazing simplicity! the Supreme Lord of the entire Universe did the mean job of driving Arjuna's chariot and that too, in public, on the battle field. When, at his sweet will, a superior person condescends to serve a subordinate, it is usually done *in camera*, and not in public. But here is the Divine charioteer, who not only kept Himself open to public gaze in His Incarnate Form as Kṛṣṇa, but even to day stands before us, in His Iconic (worshippable)

Form as 'Pārtha Sārathi' (Arjuna's charioteer) at Triplicane (Tiru-allikkēṇi) in Madras, and as Pāṇḍava Dhūta in Tamilnadu (near Madras) and also in Kāñci (also in Tamil nadu).

vārttai aṟipavar māyavaṟku āḷ aṉṟi, āvarō-
pōrtta piṟappoṭu, nōyoṭu, mūppoṭu, iṟappu ivai
pērttu, perum tuṉpam vēr aṟa nīkki, taṉ tāḷiṉkīḻc
cērttu, avaṉ ceyyum cēmattai eṇṇit teḷivuṟṟē? (VII–5–10)

Translation

Will those that appreciate the wholesome message
Of the Lord's 'Song Celestial' and with clarity of mind ponder
What unto them the Lord has done, the long list of favours,
Ridding them of the blinding cloak of birth, pestilence, old age
And death, cutting out, (root and branch), the great disaster
(Of getting lost in self-enjoyment) and granting asylum secure
At His very feet, serve aught but the wondrous Sire?

Notes

(i) The quintessence of the Lord's message in Bhagavad Gītā is in the 'Carama Ślokā' (XVIII-66), that which treats of the final or the ultimate 'Means', the loving path of surrender unto God, taking Him as the Sole Refuge, the 'Means' and the 'End' combined. This song is virtually a commentary of that Ślokā, vide also the closing aphorism (289) of 'Mumukṣuppaṭi' (Lokācārya's Manual for the seekers of Mokṣa).

(ii) Birth, in the midst of the worldlings with the attendant risk of becoming oblivious of one's essential nature caught up in a mesh like the spider's web, sickness which saps one's energies, the sudden onslaught of old age, like a thunderbolt and the dark hand of death falling on one's shoulders unawares, are disastrous enough. The greatest disaster of all would, however, be emancipation from the above calamities and staying in a disembodied state, lost in self-enjoyment (known as Kaivalya mokṣa) without tasting the bliss of divine service. It is indeed the greatest of all the favours

showered on us by the Lord to wean us away *in toto* from courting this eternal disaster of 'Kaivalya anubhava' and vouchsafe unto us the blissful service at His lotus feet, in that Eternal Land (Heaven), with absolutely no risk of our slipping back to the old ways, indeed the greatest of all His benefactions before which all the rest shall pale into insignificance.

teḷivuṟṟu vīvu iṉṟi niṉṟavarkku iṉpak kati ceyyum
teḷivuṟṟa kaṇṇaṉait teṉ kurukūrc caṭakōpaṉ col
teḷivuṟṟa āyirattuḷ ivai pattum vallār-avar
teḷivuṟṟa cintaiyar pā maru mūvulakkattuḷḷē. (VII–5–11)

Translation

Those that learn these songs ten
Out of the lucid thousand composed by Caṭakōpaṉ
Of kurukūr, adoring the Lord, who clarity personified is
And bestows on His devotees, clear and steadfast, final bliss,
Will clarity of mind attain even in this land of dismal distress.

Notes

(i) *The lucid thousand*: Like unto the turbid water in the river becoming clear and limpid in certain areas, the vedas, confused like the gummy substance in the jack fruit sticking to the straw-like stuff covering the fruit, acquire clarity in the hands of Saint Nammāḻvār.

(ii) *The devotees, clear and steadfast*: Devotees with a clear conviction, like that of the Āḻvār, that the Lord is their Sole Refuge, which cannot be shaken. The clarity of knowledge is like that obtained by Arjuna who confessed to his doubts having been dispelled on hearing Lord Kṛṣṇa's teachings. In this context, it is interesting to recall the following conversation between Nañcīyar and his illustrious disciple, Nampiḷḷai:

Nampiḷḷai: "Sire, did Arjuna attain the Lord or not?"

Nañciyar: "It is immaterial whether Arjuna attained God or not and your question is hardly relevant. We have to pin our faith to Gitā as the Lord's teachings without enquiring who are all the beneficiaries, even as the thirsty quench their thirst by drinking nice, cool water at sight, without caring to ascertain the names of those whose thirst has already been quenched by drinking water".

Seventh Centum—Sixth Decad (VII-6) (Pā maru mūvulakum)

Preamble

In the last decad, the Saint's address to the world is implicit, although the third person has been used throughout, instead of the second. No doubt, the worldlings kept aloof from God because of their exclusive absorption in sensual pleasures, totally shorn of God-love. But then, here is the Āḷvār with an enormous yearning for the Lord, of unimaginable depth and yet, he has not been able to experience the bliss of lasting communion with Him. We have of course seen him ravished by internal joy, during those delirious moments of union with the Lord (mental vision), overflowing its contents and finding expression through hymns adoring Him and extolling His great glory. In the contrary state of desertion by the Lord, he would lament loudly as in this decad, melting the stony hearts of even the ungodly. Śrī Nampiḷḷai puts it that the Āḷvār's lamentations were so loudly vociferous that it looked as if a vast ocean rose on its feet and roared with all its might; surely it cannot but dislodge the Lord from His seat in the high Heaven and compel Him to come down to the Āḷvār and oblige him with His sweet presence.

Ācārya Ammaṅki Ammal would exclaim:

"We can only sing and listen to this decad sung by others. We are, however, least competent to gauge and express, in concrete language, the unfathomable depth of the Āḷvār's languishment, finding utterance in such soul-stirring diction".

pā maru mūvulakum paṭaitta paṟpanāpā! ō!
pā maru mūvulakum aḷanta paṟpa pātā! ō!
tāmaraik kaṇṇā! ō! taṉiyēṉ taṉi āḷā! ō!
tāmaraik kaiyā! ō! uṉṉai eṉṟukol cērvatuvē? (VII–6–1)

Translation

Oh, Paṟpanāpā, Who created the worlds three, vast and varied,
Oh, Lord with lotus feet that spanned the sprawling worlds three,
Oh, Lotus-eyed, You are the Master unique of this soul lonely;
Oh, Lord, with lotus hands, when do I attain Your feet comely?

Notes

(i) Paṟpanāpā (*Padmanābhā*): The Supreme Lord, the Primate, from whose navel sprouted the lotus stalk; from the lotus flower at the upward end of that stalk, emerged Brahmā who gave birth to all the rest. The navel of the Lord thus proclaims Him as the First and Foremost.: The implication of the address in the opening line is: "Oh my Sire, can You who created all things, destroy me? I am on the verge of extinction".

(ii) The worlds created by the Lord were misappropriated by Mahā Bali unto himself and hence the Lord had to wrest them back from him. Thus there is reference to the spanning of the worlds by the Lord as Tṛvikrāma. The Lord set His feet then on all and sundries but now He would deny those very feet to the Āḷvār who pines for them.

(iii) The Āḷvār was enthralled by the Lord's lotus eyes and thenceforward he has been subsisting on them alone. How then can the Lord withdraw from the Āḷvār his very sustenance?

(iv) It was with His lotus hands that Śrī Kṛṣṇa embraced Akrūra and the same hands dealt a mortal blow to Kaṇṭākarṇa. And now, the Āḷvār is not asking the Lord to embrace him as He embraced Akrūra but only wants Him to say when exactly He would lift him unto

His lotus feet, even as He, as Lord Rāma, assured Bharata about His return to Ayodhyā from exile at the end of fourteen years.

eṉṟukol cērvatu, antō!-araṉ, nāṉmukaṉ ēttum ceyya
niṉ tiruppātattai yāṉ? nilam, nīr, eri, kāl, viṇ, uyir
eṉṟu ivai-tām mutalā, muṟṟum āy, niṉṟa entāy! ō!
kuṉṟu eṭuttu, ā-nirai mēyttu, avai kātta em kūttā! ō!
(VII–6–2)

Translation

As the Soul You stand of land, water and fire,
Air and space, creatures, one and all, oh, Sire,
You tended the cows and held aloft mount (Govardhan)
To save them, oh, pot-dancer great alas! when shall I attain
Your lovely feet, Nāṉmukaṉ (Brahmā) and Araṉ (Śiva) adored?

Note

The Āḷvār longs for the Lord's lovely feet, coveted by the exalted Brahmā, the demi-urge, in charge of creation and the eminent Rudra in charge of dissolution. Specially endowed that he is, the Āḷvār can of course conjure up the cosmic vision of the Lord in all things and beings, as their in-dweller but he 'longs for the Lord's holy feet in His specialised Form of exquisite charm.

kātta em kūttā! o! malai ēntik kal-māri-taṉṉai;
pūt taṉ tuḷāy muṭiyāy! puṉai koṉṟai am ceñcaṭaiyāy!
vāytta eṉ nāṉmukaṉē! vantu eṉ ār uyir nī āṉāl-
ēttu-arum kīrttiyiṉāy! uṉṉai eṅkut talaippeyvaṉe? (VII–6–3)

Translation

Oh, You Dancer great, aloft You held the mountain
And beat off the hail storm, on Your crown is tuḷaci, cool and nice,
Oh, Internal Controller of Śivā and Brahmā! Your glory description defies,
You are my Soul dear, me, you do, on your own, sustain
And Yet I know not where You I shall attain?

Notes

(i) Indra visited his fury in the shape of a hail storm, raining stones and Lord Kṛṣṇa warded it off by holding mount Govardhan aloft like an umbrella. As Nampiḷḷai puts it in his unique way, the Lord would have lifted the ocean itself instead of the mountain and shielded the subjects, had Indra sent down watery rain instead of the stony one! The Āḷvār now asks whether the Lord will shield only a whole township and that against the fury of the elements instead of a single individual like him, pelted by the rain of sorrow, visited on him by his very existence in this world. Actually, his affliction is much more intense than the combined intensity of the sufferings of a whole township. And yet, the Āḷvār does not want the Lord to lift yet another mountain for his sake but pines only for the sight of the sinewy arms of the Lord, the lifter of Govardhan.

(ii) Says the Āḷvār "Oh, Lord, You are the Soul iunto me, Your body. Where is the question of the body attaining the Soul? As one exclusively dependent on You, I know of no Means but You, to attain you. Does it not follow, therefore, that You have to pick me up?"

eṅkut talaippeyvaṉ nāṉ-eḻil mūvulakum nīyē;
aṅku uyar mukkaṉ-pirāṉ, pirama-perumāṉ-avaṉ nī;
vem katir vaccirak kai intiraṉ mutalāt teyvam nī;-
koṅku alar taṉ am tuḷāy muṭi eṉṉuṭaik kōvalaṉē? (VII–6–4)

Translation

The lovely worlds three You control, oh, Kōvalaṉ, wearing on Your crown,
Tuḷacı, cool and nice, shedding honey; the triple-eyed Śiva and Brahmā, the exalted
Are at Your disposal and so is Indra who the mace powerful wields;
So then, how can I attain You, on my own?

Note

The Lord having revealed to the Āḷvār, His grand glory, as the great ordainer, maintaining the exalted Brahmā, Śiva and Indra, their respective estates, as the best of all good things and at the same time, His inordinate love for His devotees, it is but meet that the Āḷvār calls upon Him to cut out all his impediments and lift him unto His feet. There is no question of the Āḷvār attaining Him through his own effort. Can a rat-boned weakling be expected to lift a mountain on his back?

eṉṉuṭaik kōvalaṉē! eṉ pollāk karumāṇikkamē!
uṉṉuṭai unti-malar ulakam-avai mūṉṟum parantu,
uṉṉuṭaic cōti veḷḷattu akampāl uṉṉaik kaṇṭu koṇṭiṭṭu,
eṉṉuṭai ār uyirār eṅṅaṉēkol vantu eytuvarē? (VII–6–5)

Translation

Oh, my beloved Kōvalaṉ, sweet unto me like virgin gem,
How shall this cussed soul, (soaked in worldly pleasures, one and all)
Attain You and behold Your resplendent Form,
In the High Heaven, the land aglow, unique and eternal?

Note

The Āḷvār avers that one like him steeped in sensual pleasures cannot attain the Lord of Supreme Splendour in the High Heaven, except through His spontaneous grace. This is obviously his reply to the question supposed to have been posed unto him by the Lord, whether he should not make some effort to attain the end in view.

vantu eytumāṟu aṟiyēṉ-malku nīlac cuṭar taḷaippa,
ceñcuṭarc cōtikaḷ pūttu, oru māṇikkam cērvatu pōl,
antaramēl cempaṭṭōṭu aṭi, unti, kai, mārpu, kaṇ, vāy
ceñcuṭarc cōti viṭa uṟai eṉ tirumārpaṉaiyē? (VII–6–6)

Translation

I know not how to get at my Lord
Bearing Tiru (Lakṣmī) on the chest and reclining on Serpent bed,
In the Milk-ocean, His body beaming blue that expands,
His feet, navel, hands, chest, eyes and lips glowing red,
Like unto a ruby radiating lovely rays red.

Note

Here again, the Saint repeats that he has no "Means' other than the Lord reclining in the Milk-ocean like unto a multi-coloured garment spread over the soft, somnolent serpent-bed, and that He should, therefore, admit him unto His fold in the exercise of His voluntary grace.

eṉ tirumārpaṉ-taṉṉai, eṉ malaimakaḷ kūṟaṉ-taṉṉai,
eṉṟum eṉ nāmakaḷai akampāl koṇṭa nāṉmukaṉai,
niṉṟa cacipatiyai, nilam kīṇṭu eyil mūṉṟu eritta,
veṉṟu pulaṉ turanta vicumpu āḷiyai-kāṇēṉō? (VII–6–7)

Translation

Shall I behold Him that bears on His chest, Tiru, my Mother,
The Internal Controller of the Spouses of Malaimakaḷ, Nāmakaḷ
And Cacī, the Redeemer of Earth, who did help Brahmā, conquer
The senses, the destroyer great of the triple citadels?

Note

The Lord got Brahmā and Śiva married to their respective consorts, Malaimakaḷ (Pārvatī) and Nāmakaḷ (Sarasvatī) and so also Indra to Saśi as the parent gets the sons, come of age, suitable brides. The Lord is also the Internal Controller of all including these exalted personalities. There are certain things like redemption of the Earth by the Lord Himself, assuming the gigantic form of a Boar and certain others like the destruction of the Tṛpurā (three citadels) and the three demoniac brothers who ruled the citadels, functioning as the Internal Controller of Rudra. Brahmā, the Demiurge had to acquire control over the senses, preparatory to his being entrusted with the task of creation.

āḻiyaik kāṇ pariyāy, ari kāṇ nariyāy, arakkar
ūḻai iṭṭu aṉṟu ilaṅkai kaṭantu, pilam pukku oḷippa,
mīḷi am puḷḷaik kaṭāy, viṟal māliyaik koṉṟu, piṉṉum
āḷ uyar kuṉṟaṅkaḷ ceytu, aṭarttāṉaiyum kāṇṭum kolō?
(VII–6–8)

Translation

When shall I behold my Lord Who did mount the lovely bird (Garuḍa)
And annihilate the Asuras who from Laṅkā fled and hid
Inside the underworld, like the horse by the Dinosaur scared,
And the fox by the lion, slew the formidable Māli and his hordes
Throwing up the corpses into heaps of mountains tall?

Notes

The incidents, set out in chapters 5 to 8 of Rāmāyaṇa, Uttara Kāṇḍa, are alluded to in this song:

Mālyavān, Māli and Sumāli, the three sons of Śukeśa, a Rākṣasa, acquired enormous strength through terrific penance, settled in Laṅka and raised a huge population giving endless trouble to the Devas. The Devas, who sought the help of Lord Śrīman Nārāyaṇa, were vouchsafed by Him, protection. This enraged the Asuras who invaded the upper worlds, surrounded the Lord who appeared there, mounted on Garuḍa and engaged Him in a pitched battle. When Mali was slain by the Lord, his brothers Mālyavān and Sumāli encountered Him and were also beaten off. The two Asura chiefs then retreated, along with the remaining followers, into the Pāthāla (underworld) and hid themselves there. Sumāli's daughter, named, Kaikaśi gave birth to Rāvaṇa and others.

The Āḻvār would want to know when he can enjoy the supreme bliss of beholding the Lord who can undoubtedly cut out all his foes (impediments) even as He destroyed these formidable demons. In the first two songs of this decad, the Lord has been set out as the goal, the next five songs reveal that He is also the 'Means' for attaining Him while in this and the next two songs, He is shown as the great Redeemer, vanquishing the forces of evil and thus cutting out all our sins.

kāṇṭum kolō, neñcamē!-kaṭiya viṉaiyē muyalum
āṉ tiṟal mīḷi moympiṉ arakkaṉ kulattait taṭintu,
mīṇṭum avaṉ tampikkē viri nīr ilaṅkai aruḷi,
āṇṭu, taṉ cōti pukka amarar ariyēṟṟiṉaiyē? (VII–6–9)

Translation

My mind, shall we at all behold the Chief of Celestials,
Who the clan routed of (Rāvaṇa) the formidable Asura bent on evil
And on the throne of Laṅkā, the peninsular Kingdom, installed
(Vibhīṣaṇa), his brother, returned to Ayodhyā and there ruled
Thousands of years and then to the Celestium returned?

Note

The Āḻvār enquires of his mind whether he will be able to behold Lord Rāma in the glorious setting in Heaven, surrounded by Angels, soaked in God-love, unlike the Earth where the ungodly aimed missiles at Him.

ēṟṟu-arum vaikuntattai aruḷum namakku-āyar kulattu
īṟṟu iḷam piḷḷai oṉṟāyp pukku, māyaṅkaḷē iyaṟṟi, [tu
kūṟṟu iyal kañcaṉaik koṉṟu aivarkku āy, koṭum cēṉai taṭin
āṟṟal mikkāṉ, periya parañcōti pukka ariyē (VII–6–10)

Translation

Surely, we will be granted the Heaven, difficult to attain,
By the merciful Ari, Who entered Gokul as a Babe just born,
Worked many a wonder ere the devilish Kañcaṉ was by Him slain,
Got the armies of the cruel enemies routed, as a Partisan
Of the five brothers and repaired back to the High Heaven,
Still feeling that enough unto them hasn't been done.

Notes

(i) The Āḻvār is now placating his mind to which he had posed the question, as in the last song.

(ii) Kṛṣṇa, as a mere Babe and later, as a Boy, worked many wonders culminating in the slaying of the fiendish Kamsa who had tried all methods he could possibly conceive of, to do away with the Divine Child. And when Kṛṣṇa came of age, He controlled the wonderful military strategy in that great battle at Kurukṣetra and led the Pāṇḍavas to victory against the evil-minded Kauravas. Having done so much, the Lord still felt He had not done enough unto His devotees. How magnanimous of Him! And what more? Even after His return to Heaven, His fury over the demoniac kamsa, Duryodhana etc., remained unabated.

pukka ari uru āy, avuṇaṉ uṭal kīṇṭu, ukanta,
cakkarac celvaṉ-taṉṉaik kurukūrc caṭakōpaṉ coṉṉa
mikka ōr āyirattuḷ ivai pattum vallār-avarait
tokku, pallāṇṭu icaittu, kavariceyvar ēḷaiyarē. (VII–6–11)

Translation

Those that are well-versed in these songs ten
Out of the illustrious thousand composed by Caṭakōpaṉ
Of Kurukūr, adoring Tirumāl, wielding the discus fine,
Who, as the Man-Lion marvellous, emerged and tore open
Avuṇaṉ's body, will the High Heaven attain
And there the damsels bright will adore them and entertain.

Note

Although the Lord did not wield the discus or, for the matter of that, any other weapon during His Avatāra as Nara-Simhā, it could be seen from 'Sudarśana Śatakam' that that the aura of Sudarśan (Discus) permeated Narasimha's nails, which tore open Avuṇaṉ's (Hiraṇya's) body. The chanters of this decad will have a good reception in Heaven, attended upon by the Apsarās over there. See also X-9-7.

Seventh Centum—Seventh Decad (VII-7) (Ēḷaiyar āvi)

Preamble

The soul-stirring utterances of the Saint, as in the last decad, should indeed have gone straight to the Lord in Heaven. In a way, the Lord would seem to have pacified the Āḷvār by enabling him to comprehend mentally His exquisite Form, limb by limb. Led away by the Lord's charming beauty, the Āḷvār, aims at physical enjoyment of the Lord's exquisite Form, with outstretched hands and feels frustrated when such an experience is denied to him. Thrown into deep dejection, the Āḷvār, once again (figuratively) transformed as the Nāyakī, hits back the mates and elders. She asserts that she could hardly yield to their threats and cajoling, overwhelmed as she was by the Lord's bewitching Form, in all its details, on a par with physical perception through the senses.

This decad is similar to V-5 and yet, there is a difference between the two. There was an alternation of the Āḷvār's rejoicing and regret, in the earlier decad, while, in the current one, the expression of stinging regret dominates, in so far as the Āḷvār could not envision the Lord's Form as a whole, but perceive only one limb, at a time, whetting his appetite, all the more, for visualising the Lord's Form, in its entirety. In this peculiar context, the Nāyakī would look upon the bewitching eyes of the Lord's as but death-dealing twins.

ēḷaiyar āvi uṇṇum iṇaik kūṟṟam kolō? aṟiyēṉ!
āḷi am kaṇṇa-pirāṉ tirukkaṇkaḷkolō? aṟiyēṉ!
cūḻavum tāmarai nāḷ-malar pōl vantu tōṉṟum kaṇṭīr;
tōḻiyarkāḷ! aṉṉaimīr! eṉ ceykēṉ-tuyarāṭṭiyēṉē? (VII–7–1)

Translation

Ye, mates and elders, I know not whether what I see
Are death-dealing twins or the lovely eyes of Kaṇṇapirāṉ, the sea-hued Lord;
Know ye that these are by me seen all around
Like lotus flowers in full bloom, tormenting poor me
And women-folks; how can I get over my distress indeed?

(ii) Kṛṣṇa, as a mere Babe and later, as a Boy, worked many wonders culminating in the slaying of the fiendish Kamsa who had tried all methods he could possibly conceive of, to do away with the Divine Child. And when Kṛṣṇa came of age, He controlled the wonderful military strategy in that great battle at Kurukṣetra and led the Pāṇḍavas to victory against the evil-minded Kauravas. Having done so much, the Lord still felt He had not done enough unto His devotees. How magnanimous of Him! And what more? Even after His return to Heaven, His fury over the demoniac kamsa, Duryodhana etc., remained unabated.

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Translation

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Are death-dealing twins or the lovely eyes of Kaṇṇapirāṉ, the sea-hued Lord;
Know ye that these are by me seen all around
Like lotus flowers in full bloom, tormenting poor me
And women-folks; how can I get over my distress indeed?

Note

Of all the limbs of the Lord, His lotus eyes, which kept the Āḷvār dumbfounded, presented themselves before him first, because it was the Lord's bewitching eyes that attracted the Āḷvār unto Him, as confessed by him in the first of his four hymnals (*Tiruviruttam*). But then, why should he feel tormented by the vision instead of being delighted? Had the Lord's Form, as a whole, been perceived by him, surely, he would have revelled in that glorious vision. But now, the Lord would appear to indulge in some cruel fun at the expense of the Āḷvār, by showing him His limbs, one by one, and watching his reaction thereto. The Āḷvār exclaims that these very eyes that attract the women-folks, could also prove fatal if their ardent aspirations to enjoy Him, roused by these eyes, are not fulfilled betimes. And again, being seen all round like lotus in full bloom, they oppress him without leaving him any chance to miss it by turning his attention elsewhere. Indeed the Lord's bewitching eyes would cast their spell on the Lord Himself if only He beheld them in a mirror.

āṭṭiyum tūṟṟiyum niṉṟu, aṉṉaimīr eṉṉai nīr nalintu eṉ?
māṭṭu uyar kaṟpakattiṉ valliyō? koḷuntō? aṟiyēṉ!
īṭṭiya veṇṇey uṇṭāṉ tirumūkku eṉatu āviyuḷḷē
māṭṭiya val viḷakkiṉ cuṭarāy niṟkum-vāliyatē. (VII–7–2)

Translation

Ye, elders, there's no use your prodding and rebuking me,
I know not whether 'tis the creeper or the leaf of 'kaṟpaka' tree.
That does the Lord's eyes adjoin or the nose of the One that ate
Butter by stealth, blazing like a steady flame bright, in my heart.

Note

Now it is the Lord's charming nose, in between the pair of lotus-eyes, that torments the Nāyakī. At first sight, it looks like a 'Kaṟpaka' creeper or leaf adjoining the Lord's eyes. It is only on a closer examination, it turns out to be the Lord's nose. The nose instantly reminds the Āḷvār of Kṛṣṇa, as a child, having eaten the stored-up butter stealthily and exposed Himself by smearing the nose with the stolen butter, a tell-tale. The Nāyakī relates that incident as if she has perceived it with her eyes; actually, even the characteristic smell of butter she appreciates now in her mental vision. The elders, therefore, asked the Nāyakī to point out to them the Lord's nose with which she was so much obsessed, but she said it was shining forth in her heart (mind's eye) like a flame, steady and bright, as if to torment her with a vengeance.

vāliyatu ōr kaṉikol? viṉaiyāṭṭiyēṉ valviṉaikol?
kōlam tiraḷ pavaḷak koḷum tuṇṭamkolō? aṟiyēṉ!
nīla neṭu mukil pōl tirumēṉi ammāṉ toṇṭaivāy
ēlum ticaiyuḷ ellām vantu tōṉṟum-eṉ iṉ uyirkkē! (VII–7–3)

Translation

Is this a fruit unique, ever *in tact*, or is it
This sinner's sin tough, that can't enojoy it right now or is it
A chip of coral, pretty and delicate, I know not;
The red lips, fruit-like of the cloud-hued Lord are seen
In every direction I turn, tormenting my life sweet.

Note

The Lord's red lips look like a red fruit which is ever fresh and knows no growth or decay; they also look like a chip of coral. The Nāyakī recognises on a closer look that they are but the lips of the cloud-hued Lord of bluish tint, which she would like to enjoy that very moment, but can't do so, because of her heavy sins standing in the way. The nectarean lips are indeed oppressive to the Nāyakī, in her present state of frustration, like nectar becoming a veritable poison, in so far as a sinner is concerned, precluding him from enjoying it. Surely, the Lord's lips would not lag behind His eyes and nose, in exhibiting to the Nāyakī their oppressive charm, making themselves distinctly visible wherever she turns, determined to end her life.

iṉ uyirkku ēḻaiyarmēl vaḷaiyum iṇai nīla viṟkol-
maṉṉiya cīr mataṉaṉ karuppuc cilaikol?-mataṉaṉ-
taṉ uyirt tātai, kaṇṇa-perumāṉ puruvam? avaiyē
eṉ uyir mēlaṉavāy aṭukiṉṟaṉa-eṉṟum niṉṟē! (VII–7–4)

Translation

Well, is this a tantalising pair of bluish bows
Whose targets are the sweet lives of poor womenfolks
Or the amorous bow of Mataṉaṉ of undying charm,
Or his Sire, Kaṇṇaṉ's brows which fiercely aim
At my life, standing quite firm?

Notes

(i) And now, it is the turn of the Lord's brows, well bent like a pair of bows, to torment the Nāyakī and sap her life. The proverbial bows of 'Manmata' (Cupid) are known to attack their natural targets, the women.

(ii) Lord Kṛṣṇa could be regarded as the Father of Manmata, the deity of exquisite charm, inasmuch as He begot upon Rukmiṇi, Pradyumna, extremely charming, as it were, a re-incarnation of Manmata. Kaṇṇaṉ's brows bore such a perfect resemblance to the bows that they could be easily mistaken for each other.

eṉṟum niṉṟē tikaḻum ceyya īṉ cuṭar veṇ miṉṉukkol?
aṉṟi, eṉ āvi aṭum aṇi muttamkolō? aṟiyēṉ!
kuṉṟam eṭutta pirāṉ muṟuval eṉatu āvi aṭum;
oṉṟum aṟikiṉṟilēṉ, aṉṉaimīr!-eṉakku uyvu iṭamē! (VII–7–5)

Translation

I just don't know whether it is the lightning white
That stays and reveals the radiance red or pearls white,
In a cluster that does my life torment; well, these smiles
Of the Lord, Who lifted mount (Govardhan) aloft, do scorch
my soul,
Oh, Elders, see I can't how I can survive at all.

Note

The Lord's smiles are likened to the lightning, with this difference that unlike lightning which is seem during a split second, the lightning smiles of the lord stay on and reveal the radiance of His red lips on which they keep dancing. The smiles are also likened to white pearls. The Āḻvār seems to have currently on view the smiles on Lord Kṛṣṇa's lips when He was holding Mount Govardhana aloft. But then, there a whole township took shelter but poor Nāyakī cannot find a single spot where she can take shelter and escape from the current oppression. Speaking about the Lord's smiles, Śrī Nampiḷḷai admirably elucidates that they dance on His lips and are thus virtually at the entrance of the lips; they should, as such, have been dealt with first and the lips thereafter. The smiles, therefore, oppress the Nāyakī, now, resenting, as it were, their relegation from the natural order.

uyvu iṭam ēḻaiyarkkum, acurarkkum, arakkarkaṭkum
evviṭam eṉṟu ilaṅki, makaram taḻaikkum taḷirkol-
pai viṭap pāmbu-aṇaiyāṉ tiruk kuṇṭalak kātukaḷē?
kaiviṭal oṉṟum iṉṟi aṭukiṉṟaṉa-kāṇmiṉkaḷē! (VII–7–6)

Translation

Are these the leaves fish-shaped? No, these are the ears,
Bedecked with rings, studded with pearls, of the Lord Who has
As His bed, the hooded serpent poisonous, which finish off alike
Womenfolks, asuras and demons and torment me with no
break.

Note

The ears of the Lord leave no chance of survival for the Asuras and Rākṣasas who will die of jealousy on beholding the charming lobes, and again, the weaker sex (women) would pine for the Lord and collapse due to the non-fulfilment of their aspirations. The Āḻvār feels tormented because he could not enjoy the Lord there and then, much as he pined for such enjoyment. It is not merely the natural charm of the Lord's ear-lobes that torments the Nāyakī

but it stands heightened by the pearls worn on them and the back-drop of Ādiśeṣa on whom the Lord is reclining. So then, the poignancy of oppression from this source makes the earlier tormenters pale into insignificance, and they even appear comparatively as benefactors like charitable persons setting up booths to quench the thirst of the weary sojourners.

kāṇmiṉkaḷ, aṉṉaiyarkāḷ! eṉṟu kāṭṭum vakai aṟiyēṉ!
nāḷ maṉṉu veṇ tiṅkaḷkol, nayantārkaṭku naccu ilaikol,
cēṇ maṉṉu nāl taṭam tōḷ perumāṉ-taṉ tiru nutalē?
kōḷ maṉṉi āvi aṭum-koṭiyēṉ uyir kōḷ iḻaittē! (VII–7–7)

Translation

Whether ' tis the waxing moon in the mid-fortnight
Or the herb deadly unto God-lovers, say I can't.
Oh, Elders, how I wish I could show you what I behold!
But I know not how it can be done, well, ' tis the forehead
Of the Lord with shoulders four, stout and fine
That blisters this sinner's soul, out to snatch my life.

Notes

(i) The Lord's charming forehead is now visualised by the Nāyaki. She wants to show it to the elders around but she can't do so, it being only a mental vision confined to her. Nor can she ask them to see it because they are not similarly gifted with this vision. The Lord's sinewy shoulders have also been mentioned in this song to identity the forehead as that of the One whose shoulders, stout and fine, enthralled the Āḻvār even as they attracted Hanumān, at first sight.

(ii) The Lord is indeed a delicious herb, as acknowledged by the Āḻvār himself in V-7, but He turns out to be deadly like poison, in the Nāyakī's present state of dejection.

(iii) If the Lord's charming features should turn out to be oppressive, it is because of the Āḻvār's sins, as he put it.

kōḷ iḻait tāmaraiyum, koṭiyum, pavaḷamum, villum,
kōḷ iḻait taṉ muttamum, taḷirum, kuḻir vāṉ piṟaiyum,
kōḷ iḻaiyā uṭaiya koḷum cōtivaṭṭam kol-kaṇṇaṉ
kōḷ iḻai vāḷ-mukamāy, koṭiyēṉ uyir koḷkiṉṟatē? (VII–7–8)

Translation

The eyes like unto self-decorating lotus, the creeper-like nose,
Coral lips, leaf-like ear-lobes, brows well bent like bows,
The radiant smiles, like unto a jewel, the moon-like forehead
A veritable region of radiance galore, all these decorate
Kaṇṇaṉ, my Lord,
And His beaming face peeps out to sap this sinner's life alas!

Note

The aggregate charm of the various limbs of the Lord, detailed in the seven preceding songs, each one of which is a decoration by itself, is reflected in Kaṇṇaṉ's beaming face, a veritable region of radiance galore, which has, however, a devastating effect on the Saint in his present disconsolate state. If he sinks down instead of being boosted up by the glowing vision of the Lord's superlative charm, it is because of his sins which preclude the external perception of the Lord's charm as well.

koḷkiṉṟa kōḷ iruḷaic cukirntiṭṭa koḷum curuḷiṉ
uḷkoṇṭa nīla nal nūl taḷaikol? aṉṟu; māyaṉ kuḻal
viḷkiṉṟa pūn taṉ tuḻāy virai nāṟa vantu, eṉ uyiraik
kaḷkiṉṟavāṟu aṟiyīr, aṉṉaimīr! kaḻaṟā niṟṟirē. (VII–7–9)

Translation

Is it that pitched darkness enveloping the whole world,
Compressed into dark-blue thread, neatly packed and rolled?
No, these are the lovely strands of hair of my wondrous Lord
Wafting the sweet fragrance of tuḻaci, cool and nice,
You, elders, know not how it steals away my life
And saying one thing or another, me you just chide.

Note

It is indeed a grand poetic imagery, the comparison of the peerless beauty of the Lord's locks. If the unwholesome

part of the grim darkness, that gripped the entire universe, during the great deluge, were weeded out, the rest could be compressed into nice, dark-blue rolls, like unto cotton strands from which yarn is spun. Attempting a comparison like this unto the Lord's lovely locks, the Saint realises that comparisons, as a rule, are much-too-feeble when it is a matter of describing the Lord's beauty galore, defying description and he would, therefore, simply call them the locks of the wondrous Lord.

niṟṟi muṟṟattuḷ eṉṟu neritta kaiyar āy, eṉṉai nīr
cuṟṟiyum cūḻntum vaitir; cuṭarc cōti maṇi niṟam āy,
muṟṟa im mūvulakum virikiṉṟa cuṭar muṭikkē
oṟṟumai koṇṭatu uḷḷam; aṉṉaimīr! nacai eṉ nuṅkaḷkē?
(VII–7–10)

Translation

Elders, You rebuke me as being forward and twist
Your fingers, surrounding me for ever, in protest,
But 'tis no use your expecting me to get round,
For immersed in the Lord's resplendent crown is my mind.

Note

The Lord's radiant crown is shedding its lustre on all the worlds and the Nāyakī's mind stands rivetted to it. There is, therefore, no point in the elders blaming her as transgressing the feminine bounds of modesty and pulling her up all the time. On the other hand, she would expect them to take steps to hand her over to the Lord to whom she rightly belongs, having come of age for such consummation.

kaṭku ariya piramaṉ, civaṉ, intiraṉ eṉṟu ivarkkum
kaṭku ariya kaṇṇaṉaik kurukūrc caṭakōpaṉ coṉṉa
uṭku uṭai āyirattuḷ ivaiyum oru pattum vallār
uṭku uṭai vāṉavarōṭu uṭaṉāy eṉṟum māyārē. (VII–7–11)

Translation

Those that can recite these songs ten
Out of the thousand composed by Kurukūr Caṭakōpaṉ,
Presenting the picture of Lord Kaṇṇaṉ, true and graphic,
And adoring Him, invisible to humans and exalted Devas alike,
Will for ever remain in the company of ardent Celestials in Heaven.

Note

Those that chant these ten songs don't have to languish without enjoying Lord Kṛṣṇa's Divine presence. They will remain in Heaven partaking of the eternal bliss of divine Service, along with the holy band of 'Nitya Sūris' inseparably. The entire hymnal of Tiruvāymoḻi depicts the Lord's Form, attributes and wealth faithfully. There lies its merit, its great strength.

It is noteworthy that the Lord, whom even the exalted Devas like Brahmā, Śiva, Indra and others cannot easily behold, made Himself visible to the Saint wherever he turned.

Seventh Centum—Eighth Decad (VII-8)
(Māyā! Vamaṉaṉē!)

Preamble

In the last decad, the Alvar felt tormented by the mental vision of the Lord's limbs, one after the other, rousing his appetite for God-enjoyment all the more. The Lord would not, however, fulfil the Āḻvār's aspiration even now and is obviously waiting for the appropriate moment of consummation. The Āḻvār knows the Lord's mind all right but still he is egged on by the exuberance of his God-love to crave for immediate union. So great was his ardour that non-fulfilment thereof should have normally resulted in his immediate extinction. He was, however, still kept alive, much to his surprise and he enquired of the Lord how exactly He enacted this wonder. "Well," said the Lord "this is not the only wonder wrought by Me, better behold My kaleidoscopic cosmic wealth". The Lord thus exhibited unto the Āḻvār many wonders, as against just one on which he sought elucidation. Overawed by the amazing magnitude of the Lord's wealth and wonders, even as sage Akrūra beheld with dismay the Divine Brothers

(Balarāma and Kṛṣṇa) inside the running water of river Yamunā, as well as on the river bank, the Āḻvār voices forth in this decad, his mental reactions to the wonderful phenomena in front of him. It might be recalled that the Lord had displayed unto the Āḻvār His cosmic wealth and splendour earlier also in III-4 and VI-3. In III-4, however, the Āḻvār just didn't know where to begin and what to say, unable to express himself with any degree of precision; in VI-3, the Lord revealed His extra-ordinary capacity to achieve the impossible and compose, with perfect ease, the incompatibles, the opposites, within His fold. And now, we see an over-awed Āḻvār attempting to describe the wonderful phenomena before him and seeking clarification from the Lord in respect of the bewildering complexities, baffling intellectual comprehension.

māyā! vāmaṉaṉē! matucūtā! nī aruḷāy;
tī āy, nīr āy, nilaṉ āy, vicumpu āy, kāl āy,
tāy āy, tantai āy, makkaḷ āy, maṟṟum āy, muṟṟum āy,
nī āy, nī niṉṟavāṟu-ivai eṉṉa niyāyaṅkaḷē! (VII–8–1)

Translation

Pray, reveal unto me Your facets many, oh, Vāmaṉā!
My wondrous Lord, You slew the demons, (Madhu and Kaiṭabha),
You are the elements five and of us all, the mother, the father
And the progeny too and all else one can, by name, utter,
As well as those one can't utter; I can't comprehened how You are
Your Form unique and also stand in all things everywhere!

Note

Many indeed are the wonders performed by the Lord. As Vāmana, the Midget, He went to Mahābali, as soon as He emerged, compelled his attention, got the donation of land of three strides, expanded Himself and spanned the entire universe; He crushed to death, the demons Madhu and Kaitabha under His thigh; He is at once fire and water, father and mother and their progeny as well, a unique position, none else can hold. Fire cannot be water and water cannot be fire; mother is different from father and the

children are altogether separate entities. Well, all these pertain to His attribute of being all-pervading. His cosmic or universal form. And yet, the Āḻvār could enjoy, with perfect mental equanimity the Lord's resplendent personal Form, as in Heaven, the perennial spring of nectar which the denizens over there drink deep all the time, as well as His universal Form, permeating all things, all over. This is because His immanence is a matter of superb wonder which keeps the Saint aghast.

am kaḷ malart taṇ tuḷāy muṭi accutaṉē! aruḷāy;
tiṅkaḷum ñāyiṟum āy, ceḻum pal cuṭar āy, iruḷ āy,
poṅku poḻi maḻai āy, pukaḻ āy; paḻi āy, pinnum nī
vem kaṇ vem kūṟṟamum ām-ivai eṉṉa vicittiramē! (VII–8–2)

Translation

Oh, Accuta, wearing on Your lovely locks tuḷaci garland cool,
With honey-studded flowers, pray let me know what the wonder is,
That You are the Sun, the Moon, the bright stars in broad expanse,
And darkness too, the rains torrential, fame and ill-fame as well,
And then, the unrelenting Death with cruel eyes.

Notes

(i) Towards the end of the last song, the Āḻvār contemplated the Lord's exquisite personal Form. That has led him on to the description of the tuḷaci-bedecked locks of the Lord in this song.

(ii) The Sun generates enervating heat while the Moon spreads its radiance, cool and refreshing; the stars and planets affect people both ways, for good and bad; darkness, the antithesis of light, provides a facile cover for the lewd and the thief; the rains help to raise the crops to feed the lives of creatures; the Lord directs and controls all these and He is also the much-sought-after praise as well as the disdainful opprobrium; when the people in different worlds, commit unpardonable moral

transgressions, He functions, as the unrelenting Agent of dissolution of the universe, being Yama's Yama. 'Mṛutyu' (Yama, the deity of death) is like unto the pickles in the eating plate. The pickles, with their appetising flavour and agreeable taste, serve as effective media for consuming food with great relish and ultimate-mately, what remains of the pickles in the plate, is also consumed. Yama, functioning as the Lord's appointed agent for dissolution, is also consumed by the Lord likewise, at the end of each Epoch, marked by the great Deluge. The upaniṣads say: "Mrutyur yasya upasecanaṁ'. The Āḻvār seeks clarification from the Lord how He could at once be all these things notwithstanding their mutual incompatibility.

cittirat tēr valavā! tiruc cakkarattāy; aruḷāy;
ettaṉai ōr ukamum avai āy, avaṟṟuḷ iyalum
otta oṉ pal poruḷkaḷ ulappu illaṉa āy, viyavu āy,
vittakattāy niṟṟi nī-ivai eṉṉa viṭamaṅkaḷē! (VII–8–3)

Translation

Do unto me reveal, oh, marvellous Charioteer,
Wielding the discus lovely, the great wonder You are,
Holding the cycle of Yugas and their occurrences internal,
The lovely things, vast and varied, all under Your control.

Note

The thing mentioned last in the preceding song was 'dissolution'. Speaking about dissolution, the Āḻvār would seem to have been reminded about the riddance by Lord Kṛṣṇā, of the entire mass of unwholesome burden on Mother Earth, through the annihilation of the armies in the great battle at Kurukṣetrā. It is well known to every Student of Mahā Bhārata that Lord Kṛṣṇā was the pivotal Figure around whom the whole thing revolved. The great Bhiṣma was heard to say that he would have routed the Pāṇḍavas and their soldiers, with just one arrow, but for Lord Kṛṣṇa functioning as Arjunā's Charioteer, plying it in an amazing manner. When Arjunā's horses were paralysed with thirst, the divine Charioteer could perform the miracle of getting water from the depth of the barren soil, by sending a shaft deep inside. Seeing this miracle, the monarchs, ranged opposite, sank down to the bottom-most depth of despair. And then, the Lord's discus could shut out the evening Sun and induct artificial sun-set, which lulled Jayadratha, the brother-in-law of Duryodhana into a sense of false security and made him fall an easy prey to Arjuna's revengeful arrow. Arjuna had sworn that he would avenge the death of his son, Abhimanyu, by killing his slayer, Jayadratha before sun-set that day. Mistaking the artificial sun-set induced by Kṛṣṇa by holding His discus aloft and shutting the Sun out for the real one, Jayadratha came out of his hiding place, feeling quite safe, when the Lord suddenly withdrew the discus and the sun shone again, making it easy for Arjuna to kill the enemy instantly. As regards this episode, there could arise a legitimate doubt, how the discus which is itself million times more radiant than the Sun, could, by merely shutting out the Sun, introduce darkness-'Śudharśanaṁ Bhāskara Koṭi tulyaṁ'. Well, this is yet another miracle of Lord Kṛṣṇa.

The cycle of Yugas has been going on and each yuga is characterised by a special feature, which is its key or dominant note. And then, the created world of staggering diversity and strange incompatibility is held together by the wondrous Lord betokening His Omnipotence. The Āḻvār cannot but marvel at this.

kaḷ aviḻ tāmaraikkaṇ kaṇṇaṉē! eṉakku oṉṟu aruḷāy;
uḷḷatum illatum āy, ulappu illaṉa āy, viyavu āy,
veḷḷat taṭam kaṭaluḷ viṭa nāku-aṇaimēl maruvi,
uḷḷap pal yōku ceyti-ivai eṉṉa upāyaṅkaḷē! (VII–8–4)

Translation

Oh, Kaṇṇā, the lotus-eyed, pray clarify a thing unto me not clear,
The Master Supreme of all things and beings that You are—
The non-changing Individuals in many an assorted grade

And the ever-changing things, vast and varied; in the Milk-
ocean broad,;
You keep pondering, reposing on Your poisonous-serpent bed;
What are the plans up Your sleeves indeed?

Note

(i) The Āḷvār seems to question the Lord whether even He has to indulge in this kind of contemplation, despite His omni- science and omnipotence and seeks clarification from Him as to what precisely He means to hit upon, as a result of such deep thinking in a state of Yoga-nidhrā (the highest form of activity).

(ii) The sentient beings (the Jīvas) do not change at all, only the material outer cloak, the body changes; on the other hand, the non-sentient things are ephemeral, in the sense that they undergo frequent changes of state. The Lord is the great ordainer of both the species. Innumerable indeed are the Jīvas, each one with its own propensities, accumulated wisdom and load of 'Karma' (deeds good and bad), unless the Jīva is God-bent, the Lord cannot possibly pull it up and naturally He keeps pondering over the ways and means of resuscitation of the Jīvas.

pācaṅkaḷ nīkki, eṉṉai uṉakkē aṟak koṇṭiṭṭu, nī
vāca malart taṇ tuḷāy muṭi māyavaṉē! aruḷāy;
kāyamum cīvaṉum āy, kaḷivu āy, piṟappu āy, piṉṉum, nī
māyaṅkaḷ ceytu vaitti-ivai eṉṉa mayakkukkaḷē! (VII–8–5)

Translation

My wondrous Lord, wearing tuḷaci, cool and fragrant, on
Your locks fine!
You rid me of all things unwholesome and made me Your
vassal
The body that binds and the bound souls, their growth and
decline
Are all by You controlled and yet, You have kept me still
In this body foul, what glamour You find in it, please tell.

Note

This is the key-song, providing the preamble for this decad. The Saint asks the Lord to elucidate the riddle of His keeping him, in this material body, in mundane surroundings, even after weaning him away from the worldly things and engendering in him inordinate God-love, brooking no further delay in its consummation. With all this special equip- ment provided unto him by the Lord Himself, the Āḷvār felt sanguine that the Lord had admitted him into His sweet fold. Prolongation of his stay in this abode of dark nescience, however, makes him doubt the Lord's intentions and hence the clarification now sought.

mayakkā! vāmaṉaṉē! mati āmvaṇṇam oṉṟu aruḷāy;
ayarppu āy, tēṟṟamum āy, aḻal āy, kuḷir āy, viyavu āy,
viyappu āy, veṉṟikaḷ āy, viṉai āy, payaṉ āy, piṉṉum, nī
tuyakku āy, nī niṉṟavāṟu-ivai eṉṉa tuyaraṅkaḷē! (VII–8–6)

Translation

Pray vouchsafe unto me clarity, oh, Vāmaṉa, of bewitching
beauty,
The individuals caught up in the vortex of varying experiences,
Heat and cold, wonder and the wonderful, confusion and clarity
Victory and defeat, act good and bad and their conseguenecces,
Are all by You ordained; but then, immense are the sorrows
Caused unto Your Subjects by such (sporting) activities of
Yours.

Note

The Saint enquires of the Lord whether He would keep even His votaries, unto Him solely devoted, bewildered like the demoniac Mahābali. May be, it is all part of His līlā (Sport) but what a lot of distress it brings on His subjects!

tuyaraṅkaḷ ceyyum kaṇṇā! cuṭar nīḷ muṭiyāy! aruḷāy;
tuyaram cey māṉaṅkaḷ āy, mataṉ āki, ukavaikaḷ āy,
tuyaram cey kāmaṅkaḷ āy, tulai āy, nilai āy, naṭai āy,
tuyaraṅkaḷ ceytu vaitti-ivai eṉṉa cuṇṭāyaṅkaḷē! (VII–8–7)

Translation

Oh, Kaṇṇā, sporting the radiant crown, putting me in great distress,
You set the temptations many and unwholesome desires,
Elation and lust breeding miseries, before all beings, stationary and mobile,
Pray let me know why You indulge in such sports vile.

Notes

(i) The Lord, proclaimed by the upaniṣads as an inexhaustible fountain of bliss, is addressed by the Saint, in this song, as the Inflictor of miseries. The fact of the matter is that, on visualising the Lord sporting the resplendent crown, the Saint's longing for communion with Him has been intensified and he feels miserable. This is but the language of the Saints, in such moments of desolation.

(ii) The unwholesome desires are those directed towards the enjoyment of sensual pleasures, straying away from God-head and remaining self-centred 'Sohaṁ' while the wholesome desires are those centred round God and His devotees (Dāsohaṁ); the former breeds miseries while the latter is blissful.

eṉṉa cuṉṭāyaṅkaḷāl niṉṟiṭṭāy-eṉṉāl āḷum kaṇṇā?
iṉṉatu ōr taṉmaiyai eṉṟu uṉṉai yāvarkkum tēṟṟariyai;
muṉṉiya mūvulakum avai āy, avaṟṟaip paṭaittu,
piṉṉum uḷḷāy! puṟattāy!-ivai eṉṉa iyaṟkaikaḷē! (VII–8–8)

Translation

How sportive indeed You are, oh, Kaṇṇā, my Master,
None can comprehend how and what You are;
You are the Controller of the worlds three and their Creator,
And You also pervade them all, in and out, oh, what a power!

Notes

(i) The Lord's sports are many and inscrutable. Even the wisest and the most exalted can hardly plumb the depths of His mysteries, His disposition and dispensation.

(ii) The Vedas proclaim that the Lord's immanence is full and complete, in and out, even inside the minutest object of sub-atomic size, which, of course, baffles intellectual comprehension.

eṉṉa iyaṟkaikaḷāl eṅṅaṉē niṉṟiṭṭāy-eṉ kaṇṇā?
tuṉṉu karacaraṇam mutalāka ellā uṟuppum
uṉṉu cuvai, oḷi, ūṟu oli, nāṟṟam, muṟṟum nīyē;
uṉṉai uṇaravuṟil. ulappu illai-nuṇukkaṅkaḷē. (VII–8–9)

Translation

Oh, Kaṇṇā, my Lord, when one defines You, there's no end
To Your intricacies, the mode and manner in which You stand,
The senses five You control, taste, light and sound,
Touch and smell to enjoying which the various organs contend.

Note

The intricate glory of the Lord with its innumerable facets defies description and baffles scrutiny. The deeds performed by the vast multitude of His subjects, with the help of the bodies and limbs dowered on them by Lord, the senses five and their subtle bases, the elements from which they emanate, all these are directed and controlled by the Lord, standing within all things and beings; There is no end to such intricacies.

illai nuṇukkaṅkaḷē itaṉil piṟitu eṉṉum vaṇṇam
tollai nal nūlil coṉṉa uruvum, aruvum nīyē;
allit tuḷāy alaṅkal aṇi mārpa! eṉ accutaṉē!
vallatu ōr vaṇṇam coṉṉal, atuvē uṉakku ām vaṇṇamē. (VII–8–10)

Translation

My Lord, Accyuta, sporting on Your lovely chest a garland of tuḷaci and lotus!
You inhere in shapely things non-sentient and sentient beings formless,

Translation

Oh, Kaṇṇā, sporting the radiant crown, putting me in g eat distress,
You set the temptations many and unwholesome desires,
Elation and lust breeding miseries, before all beings, stationary and mobile,
Pray let me know why You indulge in such sports vile.

Notes

(i) The Lord, proclaimed by the upaniṣads as an inexhaustible fountain of bliss, is addressed by the Saint, in this song, as the Inflictor of miseries. The fact of the matter is that, on visualising the Lord sporting the resplendent crown, the Saint's longing for communion with Him has been intensified and he feels miserable. This is but the language of the Saints, in such moments of desolation.

(ii) The unwholesome desires are those directed towards the enjoyment of sensual pleasures, straying away from God-head and remaining self-centred 'Sohaṁ' while the wholesome desires are those centred round God and His devotees (Dāsohaṁ); the former breeds miseries while the latter is blissful.

eṉṉa cuṉṭāyaṅkaḷāl niṉṟiṭṭāy-eṉṉāl āḷum kaṇṇā?
iṉṉatu ōr taṉmaiyai eṉṟu uṉṉai yāvarkkum tēṟṟariyai;
muṉṉiya mūvulakum avai āy, avaṟṟaip pataittu,
piṉṉum uḷḷāy! puṟattāy!-ivai eṉṉa iyaṟkaikaḷē! (VII–8–8)

Translation

How sportive indeed You are, oh, Kaṇṇā, my Master,
None can comprehend how and what You are;
You are the Controller of the worlds three and their Creator,
And You also pervade them all, in and out, oh, what a power!

Notes

(i) The Lord's sports are many and inscrutable. Even the wisest and the most exalted can hardly plumb the depths of His mysteries, His disposition and dispensation.

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uṉṉu cuvai, oḷi, ūṟu oli, nāṟṟam, muṟṟum nīyē;
uṉṉai uṇaravuṟil, ulappu illai-nuṇukkaṅkaḷē. (VII–8–9)

Translation

Oh, Kaṇṇā, my Lord, when one defines You, there's no end
To Your intricacies, the mode and manner in which You stand,
The senses five You control, taste, light and sound,
Touch and smell to enjoying which the various organs contend.

Note

The intricate glory of the Lord with its innumerable facets defies description and baffles scrutiny. The deeds performed by the vast multitude of His subjects, with the help of the bodies and limbs dowered on them by Lord, the senses five and their subtle bases, the elements from which they emanate, all these are directed and controlled by the Lord, standing within all things and beings; There is no end to such intricacies.

illai nuṇukkaṅkaḷē itaṉil piṟitu eṉṉum vaṇṇam
tollai nal nūlil coṉṉa uruvum, aruvum nīyē;
allit tuḷāy alaṅkal aṇi mārpa! eṉ accutaṉē!
vallatu ōr vaṇṇam coṉṉal, atuvē uṉakku ām vaṇṇamē. (VII–8–10)

Translation

My Lord, Accyuta, sporting on Your lovely chest a garland of tuḷaci and lotus!
You inhere in shapely things non-sentient and sentient beings formless,

(Both in the subtle and gross states), as revealed by Vedas, hoary and immaculate;
Yet You are just what Your devotees comprehend of You and contemplate.

Note

Both in the unmanifest (subtle) state and the manifest (gross) state, the Lord is in conjunction with the formless individual souls and the shapely non-sentient things. This is revealed by the Vedas, hoary and authentic. He is also visualised by the Saint, in His unique Form, bedecked with flowers and bejewelled, wielding conch and discus. Even the wisest sages and the most exalted Devas can touch only a fringe of His glory, attributes and cosmic wealth. And yet, the Lord thinks, He is no more than what His devotees comprehend of Him and meditate upon, for He loves them so well.

ām vaṇṇam iṉṉatu oṉṟu eṉṟu aṟivatu ariya ariyai
ām vaṇṇattāl kurukūrc caṭakōpaṉ aṟintu uraitta
ām vaṇṇa oṇ tamiḻkaḷ ivai āyirattuḷ ip pattum
ām vaṇṇattāl uraippār amaintār, tamakku eṉṟaikkumē.
(VII-8-11)

Translation

Those who chant, as best as they can, these songs ten
Out of the thousand elegant Tamil songs of Kurukūr Caṭakōpaṉ
Revealing the Lord, difficult to comprehend but by him well discerned,
Will for ever enjoy undiminished, the bliss divine.

Notes

(i) The Scriptural texts contain many apparent discrepancies, one text seeming to contradict or be at variance with another and only the devout, blessed by the Lord Himself with clarity of vision and understanding, as in the case of Saint Nāmmāḻvār, can reconcile these apparent discrepancies and get at the Spiritual truths, in their correct perspective, shorn of all doubts, deviations and discrepancies.

(ii) Those that recite this decad will enjoy the Āḻvār's grace and be thus assured of an unbroken enjoyment of eternal Divine bliss, without being put to the necessity of direct supplication to the Lord. As Nampiḷḷai puts it, these chanters do not have to drink water off the Lord's sleeves.

Seventh Centum—Ninth Decad (VII-9)
(Eṉṟaikkum)

Preamble

It was indeed the Lord's ingenuity that was in full evidence in the last decad, whereby He could gain time and divert the attention of the Āḻvār, astounded by the bewildering net-work of His superb wonders. In fact, we have seen this kind of happening all along, the appeasement of the Āḻvār at every turn by the Lord, exhibiting one or the other of His special traits and prolonging his stay in this abode. But now, the Āḻvār is determined to clinch the issue and demand of the Lord, what precisely makes Him resort to such tanlalising tactics, without responding to the request made by him far back, in the opening song of his very first hymnal (Tiruviruttam) that he should be lifted from this foul body, full of dirt and devilry. Was there anything wanting in regard to his yearning or did the Lod's capacity to salve him decline? No, neither this nor that. But then, why should the Lord extend his stay in this cussed land with its sordid surroundings? Well, this is precisely the Āḻvār's query unto the Supreme Lord, to which the Lord's answer is "Āḻvār! You jolly well know my intention and yet speak as if you are ignorant. Well, I have kept you in this abode to get from you the soul-stirring hymns of unparalleled sweetness for the edification and enjoyment of Myself and My devotees even as I kept the wise Bhismɑ in the specially erected bed of arrows for quite some length of tune and enriched the world through the dissemination of knowledge by that great Savant". The Āḻvār feels overawed by the Lord's tender solicitude and extraordinary love for him and exclaims: "My Lord, You are known to be above all wants and it is indeed very strange that you too should be suffering from a want like this. Even assuming that you have one such desire, You could have easily got it fulfilled

by sages Vālmīki, Vyāsa, Parāśara and others of that eminent order or by the first three Āḻvārs, the divine bards, *par excellence*. It is indeed amazing that You should have chosen me, the lowliest of the lowly, absolutely ill-equipped, for this great assignment. This is indeed the limit of Your loving condescension."

And so, in this decad, the Āḻvār gratefully acknowledges the Lord's great gesture, perplexed a good deal, at the same time, over his own inability to recompense Him.

eṉṟaikkum eṉṉai uyyakkoṇṭu pōkiya
aṉṟaikku aṉṟu eṉṉait taṉṉākki, eṉṉāl taṉṉai
iṉ tamiḻ pāṭiya īcaṉai, ātiyāy
niṉṟa eṉ cōtiyai, eṉ colli niṟpaṉō? (VII–9–1)

Translation

Strayed I from the Lord for long and yet He did admit
Me unto His fold firm and blest me in ample measure,
Knowledge, strength and all He did on me shower,
Putting me with Him on a par and by His charm exquisite
Inspired me and brought out this hymnal sweet
How can I His grace galore express indeed?

Note

The Saint thaws down in gratitude over the Lord's enormous grace in getting hymnals sung through him, duly equipping him for this assignment. Indeed, the outpourings of Saints are all inspired by God and therefore it is that the Āḻvār does not claim authorship for the hymnal, sung by the Lord through him as His mouth-piece. This hymnal is claimed to be sweet because the authorship vests in the Lord. Otherwise, it ill-becomes a poet to glorify his own poems. As Nampiḷḷai would put it the liberated soul, that goes to Heaven, sings there the Sāma Veda in sheer joy. Likewise, the Alvar gives vent to his joy by singing 'Tiruvāymoḷi' and the Lord, attracted by it, participates in the singing Himself and elaborates. It is just like the teacher holding the finger of the young pupil and writing; the little lad pushes the pencil in one direction and the teacher corrects it and makes good the lapses of the young chap. And again, the Lord set aside the mantle and revealed His exquisite

Form to the Āḻvār who stood enthralled by it and shouted with Joy, which, in turn, took the form of this hymnal.

eṉ coll꞉ niṟpaṉ-eṉ iṉ uyir iṉṟu oṉṟāy,
eṉ collāl yāṉ coṉṉa iṉ kavi eṉpittu,
taṉ collāl tāṉ taṉṉaik kīrttitta māyaṉ, eṉ
muṉ collum mūvuruvām mutalvaṉē? (VII–9–2)

Translation

How shall I my gratitude express unto the Primate,
Who as Trinity functions and Who would from within me dictate
And sing His glory in words, this mean vassal would repeat,
Bring out this hymnal and, as its author, make me out?

Note

The Āḻvār is indeed at a loss to find words to express the boundless grace of the Lord, who weaned him away from his waywardness and chose him as His mouthpiece to repeat the words dictated by Him and then glorified him as the great author of this grand hymnal. This is just like His discharging the cosmic functions through Brahmā, Rudra, Indra and the whole hierarchy, standing within them all as their Internal Controller. The Āḻvār, it will thus be seen, does not own authorship of the hymnals sung by him and makes it out as the Lord's own utterances through the medium of His beloved Saints. Even as the minor deities are made by Him to appear as Creator of the worlds, Destroyer of Tṛpura the (three flying citadels) and so on, in respect of acts actually performed by the Lord as their Internal Controller, He makes it appear that the Āḻvār is the author of this hymnal. Had the Lord uttered this hymnal directly, it would be just another piece like His Gītā and be far from the juicy thing it is, extremely delectable, coming as it does from the month of the Saint. Apart from the fact that the Lord attaches more importance to the utterances of His devotees than to His own, Nampi Tiruvaḻuti Nāṭu Tācar would illustrate the relative importance of the utterances of the Lord and the Āḻvār and their

impact on an assembly of learned men, as follows: When a person, reciting Ślokas from Bhagavad Gītā went there a-begging, they just dismissed him with a handful of rice, without allowing him a place in their midst. On the other hand, when an itinerant came across, warbling the sweet songs of Tiruvāymoḷi, the whole town and the Deity enshrined there, as well, rose to greet him, escorted him to places assigned by them with competitive exuberance and treated him with the utmost respect and hospitality.

ām mutalvaṉ ivaṉ eṉṟu taṉ tēṟṟi, eṉ
nā mutal vantu pukuntu, nal iṉ kavi
tū mutal pattarkkut tāṉ taṉṉaic coṉṉa eṉ
vāy mutal appaṉai eṉṟu maṟappaṉō? (VII–9–3)

Translation

Shall I ever forget my Lord Who desired, I would better
Become Chief of Prapannas' clan and on me clarity bestowed,
Entered my tongue to sing songs delicious which unto the pious cater,
The Benefactor great, Who unto me the gift of speech endowed?

Notes

(i) The Āḷvār gratefully acknowledges the Lord's assignment to him of the role of redeeming the worldlings, sunk in sorrow and despair, by instilling in him, as a preparatory measure, clarity of knowledge and understanding that He is the Supreme Lord of the Universe, the Sole Refuge of all His subjects. Bent upon redeeming the subjects in the 'Līlā Vibhūti' (Sportive Universe) and bringing them on a par with the denizens of Heaven, the Lord inspires His chosen few, His messengers. Tradition has it that, during his sojourn at Śrī Kāñci, the great Āḷavandār (Saint Yāmunācārya) spotted out, by mere insight, young Rāmānuja, seen in the company of Yādavaprakāśa, at the holy shrine of Lord Varadarāja, as the great religious reformer, the Chief Personage, who would, in the coming days, spread the gospel of Viśiṣṭādvaita actually known as 'Emperumāṉār Dharśana'. Āḷāvandār had no acquaintance with Rāmānuja nor did the latter know the former.

(ii) In the very manner of its birth, this hymnal (Tiruvāymoḷi) scores over Rāmāyaṇa. While the Lord stepped on to the Āḷvār's tongue and straightaway produced this great hymnal, Rāmāyaṇa had to pass through a number of intermediaries in succession, namely, Lord to Brahmā Brahmā to Sarasvatī and from her to Vālmīkī, in the sense that she entered Vālmīki's tongue to enable the latter to sing the great epic.

appaṉai eṉṟu maṟappaṉ-eṉ ākiyē,
tapputal iṉṟi, taṉaik kavi tāṉ colli,
oppilāt tīviṉaiyēṉai uyyakkoṇṭu,
ceppamē ceytu, tirikiṉṟa cīrkaṇṭē? (VII–9–4)

Translation

How can I, at anytime, forget my Benefactor great,
Seeing His great love unto me, the sinner great,
Redeeming me, tending me all along and singing His glory great
Thro' me, taking care to see no blemish creeps in, at that?

Notes

(i) It is not a matter for any wonder if the Lord sang poems of His great glory Himself. But the real wonder is, He chose Caṭakōpaṉ, ill-equipped for hymning, to sing the songs and ensured, at the same time, their perfe-ectin, eliminating the risk of contamination through his association. "It is because of His omniscience and omnipotence that He could achieve this through me" says the Āḷvār, "notwithstanding my absolute incompetence and my sins galore, involving a good deal of reclamation".

(ii) Empār would reinforce the purport of this song, by saying: "when the Lord preaches directly, as He did, in His Song Celestial (Bhagavad Gītā), such gospel is indeed absolutely free from blemishes. On the other hand, when our human ingenuity is called into play,

in bringing out laudatory hymns, it is laboured out, bearing the mark of our limitations. But when God chooses us as His select instrument for the propagation of His message to the world at large, He Himself speaks, untainted by the imperfections of His medium. As a matter of fact, He rids the medium of all imperfections and it is this that the Āḷvār gratefully acknowledges in this song".

[c.f. Milton's exclamation in his swan-song:

"Give me now my lyre, I feel the stirrings of a gift divine, within my bosom blows unearthly fire, Lit by no skill of mine".]

cīr kaṇṭukoṇṭu, tiruntu na iṉ, kavi
nērpaṭa yāṉ collum nīrmai ilāmaiyil,
ērvu ilā eṉṉait taṉṉākki, eṉṉāl taṉṉaip
pār paravu iṉ kavi pāṭum-paramarē. (VII–9–5)

Translation

The Lord Supreme blest me, least competent to hymn,
Thro' songs, sweet and pure, deeply absorbed in Him,
And the medium effective made of me, with Him on a par
To sing and spread His glory throughout the land, near and far.

Note

The Āḷvār says that he was not qualified to compose poems, as he did not have any poetic talent worth the name, and even assuming that he could compose poems, he was hardly eligible to sing the Lord's glory, as he didn't know a wee wit of His greatness and grandeur. But what has the Lord done? He has instilled in the Āḷvār the requisite knowledge and qualities and elevated him on a par with Him. The Lord sings through the Āḷvār and yet looks upon him as the Poet, *par excellence*. The Saint acknowledges this great gesture of the Lord Whose magnanimity knows no bounds, with melting tenderness of heart. Indeed, no further evidence is needed to establish the Lord's greatness.

iṉ kavi pāṭum parama kavikaḷāl,
taṉ kavi tāṉ taṉṉaip pāṭuviyātu, iṉṟu
naṉku vantu, eṉṉuṭaṉ ākki, eṉṉāl taṉṉai
vaṉ kavi pāṭum-eṉ vaikunta nātaṉē! (VII–9–6)

Translation

Oh, how gracious it is of the Lord of celestials
To choose me as His instrument and shed on me His grace
To get His glory by me sung although He could very well
Press (the first three Āḷvārs), the sweet-singing poets supreme, into service!

Note

There have indeed been many sweet-singing poets combining poetic skill and piety, like Vyāsa, Parāśara and Vālmīkī, the great Sanskrit poets and the first three Āḷvārs and 'Tirumaḷicai Āḷvār' who have many sweet, soul-stirring hymns in Tamil to their credit. The Lord could have got the 'Tiruvāymoḷi' also sung by these super-eminent poets and yet He deigned to shed His special grace on Nammāḷvār who came long after, and got these songs of His choice mouthed by him. The Lord revealed unto the Āḷvār His grandeur as the Lord of Heavens so that the latter could sing His glory. It was only when He heard His praise sung by the Āḷvār, He could feel His position as the Heavenly Lord, stable. Actually, the Heaven is the eternal land of unquestionable stability, well beyond the mischief of the deluge, when all the other worlds enter the Lord's stomach for sheer survival. And yet, the Lord is inclined to treat His transcendent glory in Heaven, on a par with the fame attained by Him through the Āḷvār's laudation.

vaikunta nātaṉ, eṉ valviṉai māyntu aṟac
cey kuntaṉ, taṉṉai eṉ ākki, eṉṉāl taṉṉai
vaikuntaṉ ākaṟ pukaḷa, vaṇ tīm kavi
cey kuntaṉ-taṉṉai, en nāḷ cintittu ārvaṉō? (VII–9–7)

Translation

My heart's fill I never can have, however long I muse
Over my beneficent Lord who did enthuse

Me to sing songs, sweet beyond compare, of His glory
As the heavenly Lord, cleansing me of my sins gory
And putting me on a par with Him, mingling freely.

Note

The Lord of the Universe, Chief of the exalted Celestials has condescended to shed His limitless grace on a great sinner, and cleanse him throughly, making him pure like Him. And what more? The regenerated Āḻvār, of immaculate purity, is made by Him to sing His heavenly glory and grandeur to His great delectation. It is indeed amazing that the Lord should feel that He flourishes only as a result of the Āḻvār's laudation; this is akin to a father, who gifted away a cow to his son, getting back the same cow as the latter's gift. So great is the Lord's loving condescension that the Āḻvār can't but muse over it endlessly. Even so, he cannot do adequate justice, seeing that the span of life is much-too-short while the magnitude of the favours heaped on him by the Lord is much-too-large.

ārvaṉō, āḻi aṅkai em pirāṉ pukaḻ
pār, viṇ, nīr, muṟṟum kalantu parukilum-
ērvu ilā eṉṉait taṉṉākki, eṉṉāl taṉṉaic
cīrpeṟa iṉ kavi coṉṉa tiṟattukkē? (VII–9–8)

Translation

Will I reach the end of satisfaction, if all the worlds,
Up and down and those in the Milk-ocean assembled
And praised the Lord, wielding the discus, Who made me laud
Him, in hymns sweet, raising unto His level me, a mere dud?

Note

Yet another way of interpreting this song could be as follows: Even if the Āḻvār acquired the combined power of speech of the denizens of Earth, Heaven and the Milk-ocean, and expressed his gratitude for the Lord who chose him as His instrument for singing 'Tiruvāymoḻi', he can never reach the end of exhaustion. This is so, because the Lord not merely made the Āḻvār sing His glory, despite the absence

of either the inclination or the competence therefor and on the top of that, He felt elated that His glory was heightened by the Āḻvār's laudation. Even otherwise, the songs He made the Āḻvār sing are so very sweet and before this favour of His, all the others heaped on him pale into insignificance.

tiṟattukku ēy tuppuravu ām tirumāliṉ cīr
iṟappu etir kālam parukilum, ārvaṉō—
maṟappu, ilā eṉṉait taṉṉākki, eṉṉāl taṉṉai
uṟap pala iṉ kavi coṉṉa utavikkē? (VII–9–9)

Translation

Were I to muster back the entire past and assemble
The whole future, right now, and enjoy the glory great
Of the potent Lord, who unto His level did elevate
Me, totally oblivious of Him, and made me warble
Many a sweet song proclaiming His prowess great,
I would still never feel satiate.

Note

In the preceding song, the Āḻvār mustered the combined power of speech of the denizens, currently on Earth, Heaven and Milk-ocean but now he invokes the aid of those who dwelt in those places in the past as well as the future inhabitants; with his insatiable ardour, he feels that all these agencies, put together, would still be inadequate.

utavik kaimmāṟu eṉ uyir eṉṉa uṟṟu eṉṉil,
atuvum maṟṟu āṅkavaṉ taṉṉatu; eṉṉāl taṉṉaip
pataviya iṉ kavi pāṭiya appaṉukku
etuvum oṉṟum illai ceyvatu-iṅkum aṅkē. (VII–9–10)

Translation

There's nothing in all the worlds, here, there and everywhere
With which to recompense the Lord Who made me hymn
Songs sweet, this grand Hymnal adoring Him;

Methought I could unto Him my soul offer
But then even that is but His own.

Note

There's no question of repaying the Lord's extraordinary kindness; even otherwise, there is nothing the Āḻvār could call his own, which unto the Lord be could offer. Even the soul is not his but belongs to Him as His vassal from time immemorial. At least, in this land of dark nescience, people with their erronerous notions of 'I' and 'Mine' might commit the mistake of offering something to the Lord as their own and realise their mistake later on with the dawn of true knowledge regarding their essential nature. Surely, there is hardly any scope for the commission of a similar mistake in the yonder heaven populated by the 'Nityās' and 'Muktās', duly enlightened.

iṅkum aṅkum tirumāl aṉṟi iṉmai kaṇṭu,
aṅṅaṉē vaṇ kurukūrc caṭakōpaṉ
iṅṅaṉē coṉṉa ōr āyirattu ip pattum,
eṅṅaṉē colliṉum, iṉpam payakkumē. (VII–9–11)

Translation

These songs ten, out of the thousand sung
By that great Saint, Kurukūr Caṭakōpaṉ,
With no Refuge, both here and in Heaven,
Other than 'Tirumāl', will breed joy, in whatever manner sung.

Note

This decad, whether sung with devotion or otherwise, will breed joy. The Āḻvār, who heads the clan of 'Praparnas' looks upon the Supreme Lord, the Spouse of Mahālakṣmī, as the Sole Refuge, both here, in the state of supplication and in Heaven, after attaining the final state of bissful union with the Lord. These songs, whether sung mechanically or with the ardour of the triple faculties of thought, words and deed, will generate joy on a par with the perrenial bliss of communion with the Lord. Certainly it goes without saying that it will be ideal if one sang these songs with due fervour.

Seventh Centum—Tenth Decad (VII-10)
(Iṉpam payakka)

Preamble

In the last decad, the Āḻvār, who thought in terms of repaying the Lord's kindness in choosing him, of all persons, for the sacred mission of singing 'Tiruvāymoḻi', was bewildered on finding nothing, he could offer unto the Lord, for there wasn't anything he could call his own and the Lord, who is above wants of any kind, would need anything from him either. The merciful Lord would not, however, keep a devotee of such a high order in a state of mental torture. And so, He told the Āḻvār that he too would be given a chance to fulfil his desire by singing this hymnal in the pilgrim centre, called 'Tiruvāṟaṉviḷai' (Kerala State), unto Him and His Divine Consorts, much to Their delectation. It may be recalled, at this stage, that Śrī Rāma listened to His own story, Rāmāyaṇa, sung by Kuśa and Lava, the Divine lads, His own progeny. Even so, it was not on all fours with the assignment currently given to the Āḻvār by the Lord. There Śrī Rāma was alone when He granted audience to the young minstrels, having got separated from Sītā, the Divine Mother, whose story, (Sītāyāś caritam mahat) Rāmāyaṇa virtually is. But here, the Lord, in His Iconic form, is looking forward to the ecstatic experience of listening to the rapturous songs of Tiruvāymoḻi, sung by the love-intoxicated Āḻvār, in the company of His Divine Consorts. The Āḻvār leaps with joy, finding that the Lord not only got the hymns sung by him but was also intent upon listening to his chanting them. How gracious of Him indeed! The Āḻvār, therefore, attempts to render the service assigned to him, at Tiruvāṟaṉviḷai in this decad, looking upon that holy place as his final goal, to the exclusion of all else, even as Hanumān said 'Bhāvonānyatragacchati', thereby expressing his stout determination not to forsake this land trodden upon by Lord Rāma and go elsewhere, not even the much-coveted Heaven. As a matter of fact, God would have nothing of our own and there is nothing we can call our own either. All that He expects from us, in return for all that He does, is to do His bidding and this is taken by Him as adequate expression of our gratitude.

iṉpam payakka, eḻil malar mātarum, tāṉum, iv ēḻ ulakai,
iṉpam payakka, iṉitu uṭaṉ vīṟṟiruntu āḷkiṉṟa eṅkaḷ pirāṉ
aṉpuṟṟu amarntu, uṟaikiṉṟa aṇi poḻil cūḻ tiruvāṟaṉviḷai
aṉpuṟṟu amarntu, valañceytu kaitoḻum nāḷkaḷum ākumkolō?
(VII–10–1)

Translation

Will the good days draw near when I can lovingly go round
Tiruvāṟaṉviḷai which fine gardens surround
And worship my Sire who happily rules all the worlds
And now stays there in the gay company of Lakṣmī, the lotus-born?

Notes

(i) The Lord has indeed chosen an enchanting place from where He and His consort could enjoy listening to Tiruvāymoḻi recital by Saint Nammāḻvār. The Āḻvār is eagerly looking forward to his visit to this pilgrim centre.

(ii) Happy indeed is the blissful union of the Divine Couple and happy indeed are the subjects who behold this holy conjunction; on seeing the happiness of the subjects, the pleasure of the Divine couple gets enhanced like unto the mother happily watching the babe sucking milk from her breast.

(iii) When Śrī Rāma took leave of Queen Kauśalyā while setting out on exile, the venerable mother wished that that very day could also be the day of His return from exile, if at all he had to go. Likewise the Āḻvār pines for quick consummation of his desire to reach this holy centre.

ākumkol, aiyam oṉṟu iṉṟi?-akal iṭam muṟṟavum īr aṭiyē
ākumparicu nimirnta tirukkuṟaḷ appaṉ amarntu uṟaiyum
mākam tikaḻ koṭi māṭaṅkaḷ nīṭu matiḷ tiruvāṟaṉviḷai
mā kanta nīrkoṇṭu tūvi, valañceytu, kaitoḻak kūṭumkolō?
(VII–10–2)

Translation

Sprinkling water richly perfumed, shall I go round
And worship at Tiruvāṟaṉviḷai, the walled city with castles tall

And banners aloft, where stays lovingly my Sire, Vāmaṉaṉ, Who spanned
In two strides, with no misgivings whatever, the worlds one and all?

Notes

(i) Even now, the devout pilgrims visiting this centre besmear the temple walls with sweet-smelling sandal paste, echoing the sentiments of the Āḻvār as disclosed by this song.

(ii) Did not Śatrugna sprinkle ice-cold water all the way from Nandigrām to the Āśram of Sage Bharadvāja, to greet Śrī Rāma's home-coming?

kūṭumkol vaikalum?-kōvintaṉai, matucūtaṉai, kōḷariyai,
āṭum paṟavaimicaik kaṇṭu, kaitoḻutu, aṉṟi, avaṉ uṟaiyum
pāṭum perum pukaḻ nāṉmaṟai, vēḷvi aintu, āṟu aṅkam, paṉṉi-
nīṭu poḻil tiruvāṟaṉviḷai toḻa vaykkum kol-niccalumē? [ṉar vāḻ]
(VII–10–3)

Translation

Shall I be so blest that I keep adoring for ever
Tiruvāṟaṉviḷai, with its gardens big, where reside scholars,
Performing the rituals five, chanting aloud the Vedas four and well-versed
In their six adjuncts and worship the buoyant Hari, mounted on the victorious bird (Guaruḍa)
Kōvintaṉ, Matucūtaṉ, my Lord, who the demons slew?
When indeed will my longing deep be put through?

Note

Even as the Āḻvār adores the seat of the Lord and the devout over there more than the Lord Himself, the Lord reciprocated by adoring Kurukūr, the birth place of the Āḻvār. Therefore it was that He was speeding towards Kurukūr, mounted on Garuḍa. They have now met halfway at Tiruvāṟaṉviḷai. The Āḻvār enjoys the Lord at this holy centre as Kōvinta, the ardent Lover of the devout and as Hari and Matucūtaṉ, the Destroyer of the enemies of His devotees.

vāykkumkol, niccalum, eppoḻutum maṉattu īnku niṉaikkappeṟa-
vāykkum karumpum perum cennelum vayal cūḻ tiruvāṟaṉviḷai
vāykkum perum pukaḻ mūvulaku īcaṉ, vaṭamaturaip piṟanta
vāykkum maṇi niṟak kaṇṇa-pirāṉ-taṉ malar aṭippōtukaḷē?

(VII–10–4)

Translation

When shall I the felicity acquire and without break contemplate
The blooming lotus feet of Kaṇṇa, my Sire of saphire hue
delectable,
Who in Vaṭamaturai was born, the Supreme Lord of glory
great,
Residing in Tiruvāṟaṉviḷai with sugar-canes stout, paddy crops
rich and fields fertile?

Notes

(i) The Āḻvār pines for perpetual contemplation of the lotus feet of the Lord enshrined in Tiruvāṟaṉviḷai, from where he is, even if it be not possible for him to go over there. This contemplation is to run on, all the time, unlike the daily rituals like 'Agnihotra' which are confined to certain parts of the day only.

(ii) There is a Jitantā śloka, recited at the end of the daily worship of the Lord, which brings out that the mere longing to serve the Lord, right in this mortal body, is rated by the devotee higher than his ascent to Heaven and occupying an exalted position there.

(ii) Here is an interesting anecdote:

Iḷayāṟrukkuṭi Nampi, a great devotee used to go to the temple at Śrīraṅgam during the festivals only, and kept on musing, with great delight, the proceedings of the last festival, till he attended the next festival. With declining age, the centenarian-devotee could not be present on the opening day of a festival, a fact, which the Deity took special note of and exclaimed "We doubt very much whether this is at all our festival when we don't find our beloved Iḷayāṟrukkuṭi Nampi around!" When the devotee presented himself with great dffiiculty on the sixth day of the festival, the Lord felt greatly pleased and enquired, "Nampi what can we do for you!" Nampi replied: "Sire this body dowered by you has done its job so far and now its mobility stands impaired". "Well, said the Lord", "if your body has dwindled, better stay with us". Nampi breathed his last by the time the Deity left the temple gate for the ceremonial procession.

malar aṭippōtukaḷ eṉ neñcattu eppoḻutum irutti vaṇaṅka,
palar aṭiyār muṉpu aruḷiya pāmpu-aṇai appaṉ amarntu uṟai-
malariṉ maṇi neṭu māṭaṅkaḷ nīṭu matiḷ tiruvāṟaṉviḷai [yum
ulakam mali pukaḻ pāṭa, nammēl viṉai oṉṟum nillā keṭumē.

(VII–10–5)

Translation

The moment we sing the glory great, spread far and wide,
Of the high-walled Tiruvāṟaṉviḷai where flowers abound,
The castles tall beam and the Lord reposes on serpent-bed,
Whose lotus feet lovely are for ever implanted in my mind,
Who chose me over many others and His grace on me shed
And made me wholly adore Him, all our sins will vanish indeed.

Note

The Āḻvār says, the Lord has shed His special grace on him, even as Śrī Rāma lavished special graces on Hanumān. See also notes under VII-9-6 in regard to the preferential treatment extended by the Lord to Nammāḻvār. Here is a fitting anecdote to illustrate how implicit faith in one's masters works miracles.

A Cōla king, named Kṛmikaṇṭa (the worm-necked) launched a crusade on Vaiṣṇavism, determined to break the images of Viṣṇu in the temples all over. On his, however, being warned by his advisers of the disaster that would befall him, if specially consecrated idols like those of Lord Raṅganātha were demolished, the King hit upon a safeguard, namely, the appointment of a competent sorcerer, who would, by special incantations, render the images efféte, destroying their spiritual power. The sorcerer would make himself invisible by applying to his eyes a magical collyrium and then

enter the Sanctoria of the Viṣṇu temples, extract the power from the idols enshrined there and then throw them into the sea. Greatly depressed by this turn of events and apprehending the calamitous repercussions of such an unholy project, Saint Rāmānuja had serious consultations with his Guru, Periya Nampi.

Periya Nampi decided that he shall pace round the periphery of the holy temple of Śrīraṅgam, thereby providing a cordon of protection and asked whether Śrī Rāmānuja could send a disciple to go with the great Master, literally as his shadow, with no thought of the self, as a separate entity. Śrī Rāmānuja very well knew that he had one such disciple, fully conforming to the specification of the master, in Kūrattāḷvāṉ and yet, he wanted the choice to be made by the master himself. Śrī Rāmānuja, therefore, told his master, " Sire, I wonder whether there is any one answering to your description, a camp follower, who hardly feels that he is following another ". Periya Nampi was, however, quick to point out, " Well, Kūrattāḷvāṉ is surely one such. Let him be detailed for this service ".

Even as Kūrattāḷvaṉ was spotted out by the master, out of so many, the Lord pitched upon Nammāḷvār for shedding on him the divine grace!

oṉṟum nillā keṭum muṟṟavum tīviṉai; uḷḷit toḻumiṉ toṇṭīr!-
aṉṟu aṅku amar veṉṟu uruppiṇi naṅkai aṇi neṭum tōḷ puṇarn-
eṉṟum eppōtum eṉ neñcam tutippa uḷḷē irukkiṉṟa pirāṉ, [tāṉ,
niṉṟa aṇi tiruvāṟaṉviḷai eṉṉum nīḷ nakaram-atuvē. (VII–10–6)

Translation

Ye, votaries, all your dire sins will get destroyed
If you could with reverence meditate on the city great,
The lovely Tiruvāṟaṉviḷai, where resides the Lord,
Who once came off with flying colours in a skirmish and caught
Uruppiṇi, the damsel, bejewelled and enchanting, in embrace tight
And is in my mind firm, for me always to contemplate.

Notes

(i) The Āḻvār beckons the Lord's votaries to just meditate on holy Tiruvāṟaṉviḷai to get all their ills and evils eradicated, *in totto*. We can, at best, wipe off only an infinitesimal fraction of our sins, through our own efforts, but the Lord's grace will wipe them off in full.

(ii) Uruppiṇi (Rukmiṇi), an incarnation of Mahalakṣmī, was the only daughter of Bhīṣmaka, king of Kuṇṭinam. She had five brothers. When she came of marriagable age, Śrī Kṛṣṇa went and sought out her hand but her brother Rukmaṉ opposed it. Intending that she should be married to Śiśupāla, he arranged for her Svayamvara, when several kings would assemble, from whom the bride could choose the one most eligible. But Rukmiṇi was so resolute that she would marry none but Kṛṣṇa and emboldened by this determination, she even sent a secret epistle to Kṛṣṇa, inviting him to come down at the appropriate moment and take her away some how, from those devils. Śrī Kṛṣṇa accordingly got hold of Rukmiṇi at the crucial moment, and drove her away openly. Śiśupāla and other kings, mustered by Rukmaṉ, who encountered Śrī Kṛṣṇa, were beaten off. The infuriated Rukmaṉ, however, pounced upon Kṛṣṇa, bent upon slaying Him and his life was spared by the Lord, at the special request of Rukimiṇi and, poor fellow, he was let off with mere disfigurement. (Srimad Bhāgavatam)

nīḷ nakaram atuvē; malarc cōlaikaḷ cūḻ tiruvāṟaṉviḷai
nīḷ nakarattu uṟaikiṉṟa pirāṉ, neṭumāl, kaṇṇaṉ viṇṇavar-kōṉ
vāṇapuram pukku, mukkaṇ-pirāṉait tolaiya, vem pōrkaḷ ceytu,
vāṇaṉai āyiram tōḷ tuṇittāṉ caraṇ aṉṟi, maṟṟu oṉṟu ilamē.
(VII–10–7)

Translation

Tiruvāṟaṉviḷai, the citadel huge, abounding in flower gardens,
Is our destination and our Sole Refuge is the Benefactor great,

Of love unlimited, Who lovingly resides there, Chief of the denizens
Of Heaven, Lord Kaṇṇaṉ, WhoVāṇaṉ's thousand arms did smite,
Waging the battle fierce in his citadel, putting the tripled Rudra askance.

Notes

(i) The Āḻvār considers this pilgrim centre, as his ultimate destination, even the High Heavens being relegated to a lower status and the Lord enshrined here, who vanquished the formidable foes, as his Sole Refuge. For details of Lord Kṛṣṇa's encounter with Bāṇāsura and his great allies, see notes under III-10-4.

(ii) No doubt, the heaven is the land of eternal bliss, the land whence there is no returning. And yet, Tiruvāṟaṉviḷai is so enchanting that even the Lord looks upon it on a par with heaven.

aṉṟi maṟṟu oṉṟu ilam niṉ caraṇē eṉṟu, akal irum poykaiyiṉvāy
niṉṟu, taṉ nīḷ kaḻal ēttiya āṉaiyiṉ neñcu iṭar tīrtta pirāṉ
ceṉṟu aṅku iṉitu uṟaikiṉṟa, ceḻum poḻil cūḻ, tiruvāṟaṉviḷai,
oṉṟi valañceyya oṉṟumō? tīviṉai uḷḷattiṉ cārvu allavē.

(VII–10–8)

Translation

Were it possible to visit and go round
Tiruvāṟaṉviḷai, by lovely gardens surrounded,
Where lovingly resides the Lord, Who the deep distress relieved
Of the Elephant in the pond huge, who his faith did pin
On His lovely feet, squeeze we can from our hearts all sins.

Note

The Lord, who rid Gajendra, the pious elephant, of dire distress, and now stays in Tiruvāṟaṉviḷai, will certainly cure us of all ills and evils. With its leg right in the jaws of the tough crocodile, the elephant was engaged in a titanic struggle for years, trying to extricate himself from the

monster. When this self-effort, grim and long, proved not only abortive but turned out to be a hindrance to the influx of the Lord's grace, the great devotee that the elephant was, he looked upon the Lord as the Sole Saviour and deliverance followed. The elephant was not in the least bothered about its own emaciation and eventual dissolution but its sole concern was to offer the lotus flower plucked by it, at such a heavy cost and still held in its trunk, at the feet of the Supreme Lord. What distressed the elephant even more, was his deep concern that the Lord's reputation as the Sole Saviour should not get tarnished by His not coming down to his rescue. It is precisely this, that has been referred to in this song, as the deep distress of the elephant. And so, the Lord feels benefited by the elephant, helping Him to redeem His reputation as the Sole Saviour of His subjects. This great trait of Lord Mahāviṣṇu of identifying Himself as the recipient of a favour when He is actually conferring one on His devotees and feeling distressed over the miseries of His subjects even more than they do, is inherited by His devotees. A true Vaiṣṇava (a votary of Lord Viṣṇu) is, therefore, one who possessed this remarkable trait.

tīviṉai uḷḷattiṉ cārvu alla āki, teḷi vicumpu ēṟaluṟṟāl,
nāviṉuḷḷum, uḷḷattuḷḷum, amainta toḻiliṉuḷḷum naviṉṟu,
yāvarum vantu vaṇaṅkum poḻil tiruvāṟaṉviḷai-ataṉai
mēvi valañceytu, kaitoḻak kūṭumkol? eṉṉum-eṉ cintaṉaiyē.

(VII–10–9)

Translation

With a mind thoroughly cleansed, rid of all sins,
I could perhaps reach Heaven and yet, in my thoughts do I pine For lovely Tiruvāṟaṉviḷai where the pious with thorough discipline
Of word, deed and thought congregate and worship; I wish I would remain
In that holy centre, circumambulate and worship with joined palms.

Note

The Āḻvār's desire to reach this pilgrim centre is so great that even the high Heaven recedes to the background. Therefore, his thoughts are wholly centred on whether he would at all be able to reach that centre, stay firmly there and go round the place with great piety. Not only that, he feels that this holy centre is so very enchanting that is is bound to attract even the denizens of Heaven.

cintai maṟṟoṉṟin tiṟattatu allāt taṉmai tēva-pirāṉ aṟiyum;
cintaiyiṉāl ceyva tāṉ aṟiyātaṉa māyaṅkaḷ oṉṟum illai-
cintaiyiṉāl, colliṉāl, ceykaiyāl, nilattēvar kuḻu vaṇaṅkum
cintai makiḻ tiruvāṟaṉviḷai uṟai tīrttaṉukku aṟṟa piṉṉē.

(VII–10–10)

Translation

There's hardly a thought that crosses one's mind,
The omniscient Lord cannot comprehend;
Surely, He knows that I think not of aught
But the Lord immaculate, Who remains enshrined
In Tiruvāṟaṉviḷai, that exilarates one's heart.
Worshipped by the devout thro' word, deed and thought.

Note

This song provides the reply to the question supposed to have been put to him as to what he would do in case the Lord forced him into Heaven, which he had been demanding from Him quite often before. The Lord, being all-knowing, He is well aware that the Āḻvār's mind now stands rivetted to Tiruvāṟaṉviḷai which has taken precedence over everything else, including the Heaven. Further, He is known to grant the boon prayed for by the subject, (Purusārta). That being the case, there is absolutely no risk of the Lord granting him anything other than that desired by him, even Heaven falling in the excluded category in this particular context. It is noteworthy that the Āḻvār does not even mouth the word. 'Heaven' and says, in general terms, that he does not think of anything else but the holy centre of Tiruvāṟaṉviḷai.

tīrttaṉukku aṟṟapiṉ, maṟṟu ōr caraṇ illai eṉṟu eṇṇi, tīrttaṉukkē
tīrtta maṉattaṉaṉ āki, ceḻuṅ kurukūrc caṭakōpaṉ coṉṉa
tīrttaṅkaḷ āyirattuḷ ivai pattum vallārkaḷait tēvar vaikal
tīrttaṅkaḷē eṉṟu pūcittu, nalki uraippar tam tēviyarkkē.

(VII–10–11)

Translation

Unto their spouses shall ever say the Celestials in Heaven,
That those well-versed in these songs ten
Out of the immaculate thousand of Kurukūr Caṭakōpaṉ,
Dedicated to the immaculate Lord, as the sole Means,
Are indeed very pure, entitled to great reverence.

Notes

(i) It has been given out here, as the benefit accruing to those chanting this decad, that the Eternal Heroes (Nitya Sūrīs), in Heaven, shall honour them a great deal and refer to them as of great sanctity, while talking to their spouses at the height of their joy born of their blemishless service unto Lord Vaikuṇṭanātha (the transcendent Lord in Heaven, in His 'Para' aspect). It is then that they feel inclined to divulge the secrets to their dear ones, even as the redoubted saint Rāmānuja divulged to those, eagerly assembled in front, the purport of the 'Carama Śloka', notwithstanding the oath of secrecy administered to him by his master, Goṣṭipūrṇar. Garuḍa has two wives, by name, Rudrā and Sukīrti while the wife of Śenāpathi (Cēṉai Mutaliyār) is Sūtravati. These pre-eminent 'Nityās' would always speak in superlative terms about the chanters of this decad.

(ii) *The Lord immaculate*: Himself of impeccable purity, He is also the great Sanctifier, Who renders His votaries also absolutely pure. River Gangā got sanctified by the touch of His feet and Śiva, in turn, got sanctified by holding Gangā on his matted locks.

(iii) *Immaculte thousand*: All the songs in this great hymnal are like unto as many sacred waters.

THE CENTUM IN RETROSPECT
(DECAD WISE SUMMARY)

(VII-1) : *In the opening decad*, the Āḻvār follows up the trend of thought, as in VI-9-9, where he dreaded the mischief of the senses and the frighful possibility of his going astray in the event of the prolongation of his stay in this abode. If the Āḻvār dreads in this manner, despite his having taken a deep plunge into the ocean of divine consciousness, it is because this land is notorious for its corrupting influence, bringing within its dirty pale even the 'Nitya Sūris', the proximate attendants of the Lord in Heaven, should they *ever happen* to step on to this soil;

(VII-2) : The Āḻvār, whose stay in this abode is being prolongued by the Lord, despite his protestation, is once again (figuratively) transformed as the Nāyakī (Mistress), weighed down by melancholy too deep for words. The critical condition of the Nāyakī and her various moods are narrated *in the second decad* by the gnostic mother to Lord Raṅganātha, enshrined in Śrīraṅgam (Tamil Nadu), bending over her daughter, right in the Sanctum. The mother enquires of the Lord, the Sole Saviour, as to what His intentions are and how exactly He would like to deal with her love-lorn daughter. This decad, however, ends on a happy note, the mother being mighty glad that her daughter has, after all, attained the benign feet of Lord Raṅganā.ha;

(VII-3) : The bliss of the union of the Nāyakī and Lord Raṅganātha having overflown its continents, the Lord hits upon a method whereby the God-enjoyment of the Nāyakī could be stabilised, instead of her being swept off by it. The Lord goes to Teṉtiruppēreyil (near the Āḻvār's birth place) on a hunting expedition, by way of relieving the distress of the people over there from the depredations of wild animals. Although the Nāyakī herself equipped Him with weapons and bid Him farewell, wishing Him success, yet she is all agog to go there herself, unable to brook separation from her Lord even for a short while. *In the third decad*, we see the Nāyakī insisting that she shall go, in the face of stiff opposition from her mother, mates and other kinsfolk. At best, she would allow them to escort her and leave her with the Lord, even if they cannot allow her to go alone;

(VII-4) : Just when the Nāyakī was attempting to go to Tiruppēreyil where the Lord had gone for game-hunting, he returned victorious. Exceedingly jubilant over the Lord's quick return from the victorious expedition, Parāṅkuśa Nāyaki gets locked up in His sweet embrace, by way of relieving His fatigue (mental experience of course). In his current festive mood, the Āḻvār recounts *in the fourth decad* the Lord's wondrous deeds and benefaction, vast and varied, exclaiming, "What a marvel!" "What a wonder!" and so on.

(VII-5) : *In the fifth decad*, the Āḻvār cites some more achievements of the Lord, much to his own delectation. At the same time, he could not help wondering how the worldlings whose birthright it is to share this enjoyment,

kept aloof from God and he even felt vexed with them for their callous indifference to Him, in the face of His numerous deeds, good and great, bringing to the fore His benevolent dispensations and loving condescension.

(Although it is all worded in the third person, this decad is indeed yet another address of the Āḻvār to the *wordly me*).

(VII-6) : Despite his enormous yearning, of unimaginable depth, the Āḻvār has not been able to experience the bliss of lasting communion with the Lord. Alternating between ravishing joy and deep dejection, as seen all along, the Āḻvār, in his present disconsolate state laments loudly, *in the sixth decad*, so as to melt even the stony hearts of the ungodly. In the first two songs of this decad, the Lord has been set out as the goal, the next five songs reveal Him as also the 'Means' for attaining Him while the three following songs highlight Him as the Great Redeemer, destroying the ungodly and salving the devout through His voluntary grace, cutting out all their impediments (sins).

(VII-7) : In response to the soul-stirring utterances of the Āḻvār, as in the sixth decad, the Lord enabled him to comprehend (mentally of course) His exquisite Form, limb by limb. Led away by the Lord's charming beauty, the Āḻvār aims at external perception and physical enjoyment of the Lord's enchanting Form, with outstretched hands but feels frustrated, when the experience longed for, is denied to him. The Āḻvār, once again transformed (figuratively) as Nāyakī, hits back the prodding mates and elders, overwhelmed by the Lord's bewitching beauty. But it is a note of stinging regret that runs through the *entire seventh decad* as the Nāyakī could not envision the Lord's Form as a whole, but perceive only one limb at a time, whetting her appetite all the more for the enjoyment of the Lord's Form, in its entirety;

(VII-8) : Cut out from the worldly moorings and with God-love welling up his boson, by leaps and bounds, the Āḻvār craves for immediate union with the Lord. So great is the Āḻvār's ardour that non-realisation of his inordinate longing should have normally resulted in his collapse and extinction. It is, therefore, a matter of great wonder for him that he is still kept alive in this narrowing abode, with all its susceptibilities. When asked by him to elucidate this wonder wrought by the Lord, he exhibits unto the Āḻvār, many more wonders—His kaleidoscopic cosmic wealth. Thereupon, the Āḻvār voices forth *in the eighth decad* his mental reactions to the wonderful phenomena in front of him, besides seeking clarification from the Lord, in regard to the many bewildering complexities, baffling intellecutal *comprehension*;

(VII-9) : Perplexed over the prolongation of his stay in this cussed land with its sordid surroundings, the Āḻvār elicits from the Lord his intention in this regard. The Āḻvār is informed that he has been kept in this abode in order to get from him, the soul-stirring hymns of unparalleled sweetness, for the edification and enjoyment of Himself and His devotees. Overawed by the Lord's tender solicitude and loving condescension, in choosing him for this assignment, in preference to the eminent sages like Vyāsa, Parāśara and Vālmīki and the sweet singing divine bards, *par excellence*, the first three

Āḻvārs, the Āḻvār gratefully acknowledges *in the ninth decad* the Lord's great gesture, perplexed a great deal over his inability to recompense the Lord, as there was hardly anything he could call his own;

(VII-10) : The Lord has indeed chosen an enchanting place, namely, Tiruvāṟaṉviḷai (Kerala State) from where He and His dear Consort (Mahālakṣmī) could enjoy listening to Tiruvāymoḻi recital by Saint Nammāḻvār. The Āḻvār, whom we saw, in the ninth decad, remaining perplexed over his inability to recompense the Lord for the extraordinary grace shed by Him, was, therefore, given a chance to fulfil his heart's desire, by singing this great hymnal unto Him and His Consort, in that holy centre, much to Their delectation.—And so, *in the concluding decad of this Centum*, the Āḻvār attempts to render the service graciously assigned to him by the Lord. So great is his desire to reach this fascinating pilgrim centre, looking upon it as his ultimate destination, relegating even the high Heaven to the background.

BOOK VIII

Eighth Centum—First Decad (VIII-1)
(Tēvimār āvār)

Preamble

In the last decad, the Āḻvār longed for the pleasure of singing Tiruvāymoḻi before the Divine couple at Tiruvāṟaṉviḷai and rendering unto Them other kinds of service as well. But then, the project did not get off the ground and non-fulfilment of his cherished desire made the Āḻvār grow sceptical of the Lord's bonafides and His ability to concede the wish of His devotees. This doubt is expressed in this decad.

The Āḻvār feels vexed that he has been thwarted from achieving his desired objective even under the most propitious circumstances. The Divine consorts are beside the Lord, reclining on the serpent-bed at Tiruvāṟaṉviḷai, ready to grant him audience and the 'Nitya Sūris' are also around; the Lord is omnipotent and can easily meet the aspirations of the devotees by assuming any Form, suited to the purpose and on his part, the yearning is much-too-deep. And yet, the Āḻvār could not achieve his objective, giving rise to frustration that casts doubts in his mind as to whether the well-known traits of the Lord such as His readiness to respond to the requsts of His devotees, looking upon their woes as His own, in the sense that they are but His modes etc., have become ineffective, because of him. This was precisely how Sītā bemoaned her miserable lot during her captivity in Laṅkā, seriously suspecting Śrī Rāma's intentions and inclinations towards her. As a matter of fact, the saints subsist solely on the sweet contemplation of the Lord's auspicious traits and once this vital communication is cut out, they will just cease to exist. The Lord apprehended that the Āḻvār, sunk in despair under the delusion that the Lord's auspicious traits have dried up, might collapse altogether and, therefore, set at naught his doubts by calling upon him to ponder over all that He had done for him earlier and assuring Him of the due fulfilment of whatever He intended to do further for him. Thus consoled, the Āḻvār feels elevated from the erstwhile depression.

tēvimār āvār tirumakaḷ, pūmi;
  ēva, maṟṟu amarar āṭceyvār;
mēviya ulakam mūṉṟu-avai āṭci;
  vēṇṭu vēṇṭu uruvam niṉ uruvam—
pāviyēṉ-taṉṉai aṭukiṉṟa kamalak
  kaṇṇatu ōr pavaḷa vāy maṇiyē!
āviyē! amutē! alai kaṭal kaṭainta
  appaṉē! kāṇumāṟu aruḷāy. (VIII–1–1)

Translation

Tirumakaḷ and Mother Earth are Your Consorts Divine,
(Befitting Your beauty and majesty), the Celestials are Your vassals,
(Ever ready to do Your bidding) You are the Sovereign
Of the three worlds, assume You can any Form at will;
Your lotus eyes and coral lips peerless, however, torment this sinner's soul,
Oh, gem of a Lord, dear unto me like life! Nectar insatiable,
Oh, Sire, You did the surging ocean churn, pray, let me behold you.

Note

The Lord has revealed Himself before the Āḻvār's mental vision in all His might and majesty in that glorious setting; the Divine Consorts and the Nitya Sūris, who make the supplicant's position safe and sound by virtue of their good offices, are around; the Lord is the Sovereign Master of all the worlds and apart from the immensity of His wealth, He is omni-potent, He churned the Milk-ocean once and delivered the 'Amrut' (ambrosia) to the self-centred and egotistic Devas and in spite of such an extremly favourable background, it is a pity He would not grant the wish of a selfless devotee of the eminence of Saint Nammāḻvār. While this very thought is depressing enough, the dejection gets accentuated when he muses over the Lord's lotus eyes, coral lips and radiant Form which he could not currently behold. Of course, the Āḻvār doesn't want the Lord to take, for his sake, the trouble of churning the ocean as He did for the selfish Devas, and all that He prays for is

that he might be enabled to behold the Lord's bewitching Form, so as to sustain himself.

kāṇumāṟu aruḷāy eṉṟu eṉṟē kalaṅki,
  kaṇṇa nīr alamara, viṉaiyēṉ
pēṇumāṟu, ellām pēṇi, niṉ peyarē
  pitaṟṟumāṟu aruḷ eṉakku; antō!
kāṇumaṟu aruḷāy-kākuttā! kaṇṇā!
  toṇṭaṉēṉ kaṟpakak kaṉiyē!
pēṇuvār amutē! periya taṉ puṉal cūḻ
  peru nilam eṭutta pērāḷā! (VIII–1–2)

Translation

Agitated stands this sinner, tears flooding the eyes,
(For, many a time did I call you, eager to behold
Your Form exquisite), many a method did I adopt (which success defied)
Your grace rests merely on my prattling Your names (bad luck) alas!
Oh, Lord, You did, as Kākuttaṉ and Kaṇṇaṉ, incarnate,
You are unto this vassal the fruit of the wish-yielding tree,
Nectar of the devout, You did redeem, oh, Benefactor great,
The big Earth from deep waters, cool, may You be visible unto me.

Note

No doubt, it is the Lord's grace that makes the Āḻvār cry out for it all the time, till it actually descends on him, without indulging in any kind of aberration, egging him on to self-effort to induce His grace. An irrepressible longing for quick consummation, resulting from inordinate God-love, made an impatient Āḻvār attempt quite a few methods, aimed at acceleration of his union with the Lord but all these proved ineffective. And now, he does nothing more than mentioning the Lord's names which again is, of course, due tot he Lord's grace and stamps him out as one apart from the worldlings. But this is not enough and the Āḻvār pines for beholding the Lord's bewitching Form and he invites Him to appear before him, even as He had come down

as Rāma and Kṛṣṇa, in His incarnate Forms, making Himself visible to sages and shepherdesses and the inhabitants of the remote forests. Actually, the Lord has never been apart from Himself nor is He aware of those separated from Him; while the 'Nitya Sūrīs' (Ever-free angles) in Heaven, His proximate attendants know no separation from the Lord, the 'Nitya Samsarīs', wallowing in worldly life, are totally oblivious of Him and are, therefore, not conscious of their separation from Him. The Āḻvār is the solitary soul, at this end pining for the Lord, unable to bear the pangs of separation from Him.

eṭutta pērāḷaṉ nantakōpaṉ-taṉ
iṉ uyirc ciruvaṉē! acōtaikku
aṭutta pēriṉpak kula iḷam kaḷirē!
aṭiyaṉēṉ periya ammāṉē!
kaṭutta pōr avuṇaṉ uṭal iru piḷavāk
kaiukir āṇṭa em kaṭalē!
aṭuttatu ōr uruvāy iṉṟu nī vārāy-
eṅṅaṉam tēṟuvar umarē? (VIII–1–3)

Translation

The little one dear as life unto Nantakōpan, the great Treasure-grasper,
Acōtai's vicarious Joy personified, the elephant calf of that clan You are,
Oh, Benefactor great, Who did unto this vassal Your glory reveal,
An ocean of compassion unto the devout, You tore off with Your nails,
Avuṇaṉ, the battle-hungry, into halves and yet, now You appear not
Before me, taking up the Form You deem fit; (should you thus neglect),
How can devotees like me trust You (as the Protector great)?

Notes

(i) The Āḻvār's enquiry, as above, could either point out to the Lord, how at all His devotees can sustain themselves

if He doesn't oblige them with His sweet presence, the great Elixir of life, but keeps away, as He is doing at present,

or

express the doubt as to how His reputation as the henchman of His devotees, aired through the Scriptures, the Itihāsa Purāṇas etc., with a great deal of fanfare and publicity, could be taken for granted, without the concrete proof thereof, especially when He is keeping aloof from the Āḻvār, despite his passionate longing for His immediate presence.

(ii) Nandagopa is aptly referred to, as the great Treasure-grasper inasmuch as the Lord (Śrī Kṛṣṇa) crossed over to him on the very night of His descent into this world. Nanda hadn't even dreamt of this windfall and yet, the Lord of the Universe, higher than the highest (Para Brahmam), at His sweet volition, courted Nanda's courtyard, regaling him in a thousand ways, while the luckless Vasudeva had to be contented with a mere glimpse of the Divine Babe, born in the Prison-house, only to get out of it immediately. This makes all the difference between 'Svagata svīkāra' (i.e.) courting the Lord as the 'Means' and 'Paragata svīkāra' (i.e.) the condescending love of the Lord shed on some one of His choice, at His sweet volition. Is there indeed a greater Treasure than the Lord Who resides right inside every one and yet can be enjoyed only by the felicitous few? Nandagopa is, therefore, rightly acclaimed as the great Treasure-lifter, who didn't have to lift the Treasure, as such, but could enjoy it like one who comes by a fabulous treasure-trove by sheer luck. Even so, the lion's share of the enjoyment of this great Treasure went to Acōtai (Yaśodhā) who played the mother of the Divine Babe, a role which should have actually been filled by poor Devakī. The bliss enjoyed by Yaśodhā was indeed several times more than that enjoyed by the Celestials in the High Heavens.

(iii) *The elephant calf*: A mighty animal though, the elephant meekly submits itself to be tethered to a peg which could be easily uprooted, with but a small jerk of the huge frame of the beast. The Almighty Lord submitted Himself to the yoke of Yaśodhā who tied Him fast to a pounder, as if He was such a helpless pigmy and then, the Gopīs (the damsels of Virundāvan) would order Him about. Oh, what an amazing submissiveness! The Āḻvār too seems to feel, according to Nampiḷḷai, that the Lord could have as well been directed and controlled by him even as Nandagopa and Yaśodhā did, assuming the 'vātsalya' stance instead of following the 'Master-servant' relationship, allowing Him to play the over-bearing overlord who would not mingle freely with His subjects.

(iv) 'Avuṇaṉ' is the Tamil word for Hiranya whom Lord Narasimha tore down, all for the sake of that little lad, Prahlāda. The Āḻvār would seem to feel that he is not obliged by the Lord Who did so much for that young chap. The Āḻvār is even led to suspect whether the Lord had hired out all those Sages, Vyāsa, Parāśara etc., to lavish all those epithets on Him, which do not actually fit in with Him. At least to clear up such mis-givings lurking in the Āḻvār's mind, the Lord should appear before him, assuming an appropriate Form.

umar ukantu ukanta uruvam niṉ uruvam
āki, uṉ-taṉakku aṉpar āṉār-
avar ukantu amarnta ceykai un māyai
aṟivu oṉṟum caṅkippaṉ viṉaiyēṉ-
amar atu paṇṇi, akal iṭam puṭai cūḻ
aṭu paṭai avitta ammāṉē!
amarar-tam amutē! acurarkaḷ nañcē!
eṉṉuṭai ār uyirēyō! (VIII–1–4)

Translation

My Lord, the battle (of Mahā Bhārata) You brought on to quell the cruel armies, spread across, nectar You are unto the

Celestials, Deadly poison You are unto Asuras and dear life unto me! You assume
The Form dear unto Your devotees, the wondrous deeds, You perform,
Endear You unto the devout; this sinner is, however, led to suspect
Whether all that is said of You is at all correct.

Note

The Āḻvār hitherto subsisted on the sure and certain knowledge that God subserves His devotees, ready to do their bidding and assume the Forms they devoutly long to enjoy. But his knowledge and faith, in this great trait of the Lord, are getting shaken, in his present state of dejection. The Lord is undoubtedly the repository of innumerable auspicious traits and it is the Āḻvār's sins, as he puts it, that makes him stand apart from Him and even go to the length of suspecting this unassailable position of the Lord.

ār uyirēyō! akal iṭam muḻutum
paṭaittu, iṭantu, uṇṭu, umiḻntu, aḷanta
pēr uyirēyō! periya nīr paṭaittu, aṅku
uṟaintu, atu kaṭaintu, aṭaittu, uṭaitta
cīr uyirēyō! maṉicarkkut tēvar
pōlat tēvarkkum tēvāvō!
ōr uyirēyō! ulakaṅkaṭku ellām!—
uṉṉai! nāṉ eṅku vantu uṟukō? (VIII-1-5)

Translation

You are my life dear, oh Lord! You did create
The spacious worlds, one and all, pulled them out
From beneath the waters deep, during the deluge ate
And later spat them out, the Supreme Lord that You are,
You spanned the worlds, reposed on the vast sheet of water,
Churned the ocean once, then bunded it and broke the bund later;
Could You unto Devas be what they are unto men, oh, great One,
You, the unique Soul of all the worlds, where shall I attain?

Notes

(i) In the preceding song, the Āḻvār would appear to have provoked the Lord into questioning him, how one, so ill-equipped as he, could think of attaining Him and on the top of that, doubt His greatness and bonafides. The Āḻvār's answer is that he is but the body and the Lord, the life within, whose bounden duty it is to take care of him. There was hardly any question of the body pursuing a path of its own, by way of practising austerity, discipline etc. Actually, it was He who did, from time to time, all that had to be done, by way of creating the worlds, sustaining them within His stomach during the deluge, refunding them later on to their former sistuations, rescuing the worlds from Mahā Bali, the usurper, by spanning them all, in just three strides, so on and so forth. And then, He lay on the ocean where came the Divine Mother through His churning; He also bunded the ocean to cross over to Laṇkā, to get at the Mother and later demolished the bund, so as to prevent the entry of the Rākṣasas into the mainland.

(ii) The humans could subsist on mere food and water while the Devās need 'Amrut' (ambrosia) for their subsistence. If this marks the distance between the mortals and the immortal Devas, well, there is not only that much distance but very much more between the Devas and the Supreme Lord, the 'Devādi Deva' and the comparison is thus not on all fours. While the ratio between Man and Deva is a definite quantum, that between the Deva and the Lord would baffle even the wildest imagination and cannot be put in finite terms.

eṅku vantu uṟukō, eṉṉai āḻvāṉē?—
  ēḻ ulakaṅkaḷum nīyē;
aṅku avarkku amaitta tēyvamum nīyē;
  avaṟṟu-avai karumamum nīyē;
poṅkiya puṟampāl poruḷ uḷavēlum,
  avaiyumō nī iṉṉē āṉāl,
maṅkiya aṟivām nērppamum nīyē;
  vāṉ pulaṉ iṟantatum nīyē. (VIII–1–6)

Translation

My Sovereign Lord, the worlds seven and the deities worshipped therein,
The rituals unto them performed as well as things in regions beyond,
All things and beings, subtle or manifest are unto You bound;
Well, such a one where and how do I attain?

Notes

(i) The Āḻvār's query is how he can, on his own, attain the Lord Who is the Supreme Controller of all the worlds, Agni, Indra and other deities, worshipped by the respective votaries in different climes, the rituals performed, as part of such worship, as well as all things lying in the regions beyond. How can a lame man get on to the top of Mount Meru? The lameness denotes the incapacity to pursue the normal paths prescribed by the Scriptures to get at the Lord. But then, it behoves the Lord, as the Master, who has striven hard all the time for the Āḻvār's evolution, right up to this stage, to follow it up to the point of final fruition, with no ancillary effort on his part.

(ii) As already stated in V-2-8, it is the Supreme Lord Who has set up in different climes the minor deities to receive the homage the votaries pay them and grant them boons. This is reinforced here. The prescriptive rites and rituals offered to these deities actually reach the Supreme Lord Whose agents these deities are, rather His bodies through which He carries out His multifarious functions.

(iii) As mentioned in Śloka 17 of Śrī Āḷavandār's 'Stotra Ratna', the Lord's possessions (Vibhūti) are indeed very vast and immense, comprising, *inter alia*, the numerous Cosmic worlds with all their inner contents and the external multiplicity of layers, each of which is ten times bigger than the immediately preceding one. (yat daśottarāṇyāvaraṇāni yāni ca). The region beyond the seven worlds, alluded to in this song, denotes these external layers.

iṟantatum nīyē; etirntatum nīyē;
nikaḻvatō nī; iṉṉē āṉāl,
ciṟanta niṉ taṉmai atu, itu, utu eṉṟu
aṟivu oṉṟum caṅkippaṉ viṉaiyēṉ—
kaṟanta pāl! neyyē! neyyiṉ iṉ cuvaiyē!
kaṭaliṉuḷ amutamē! amutil
piṟanta iṉ cuvaiyē! cuvaiyatu payaṉē!
piṉṉai tōḷ maṇanta pēr āyā! (VIII–1–7)

Translation

Sweet as milk fresh-drawn and the ghee that from it ensues,
You are, my Lord, the very sweetness in ghee, the ambrosia,
That from the ocean emerged, with its sweet contents,
The joy that from such sweetness results; the charming Piṉṉai
You did wed, oh, Gopal, the past, the future and the present
You do control; this sinner is losing faith in You, even then,
As the Lord Supreme of all things, near, far and in between.

Note

The Āḻvār says that the knowledge of the Lord being the Supreme Controller of all things and beings, abiding in all, which sustained him hitherto, is forsaking him now, the sinner that he is. Time, with its triple components of 'Past', 'Present' and 'Future' and all things and beings embraced within its folds, are but the Lord's modes. The Āḻvār could, therefore, discern the hand of the Lord, in all happenings, at all times. The Lord is the quintessence of all that is delicious, the inner core of sweetness. This sweetness gets heightened manifold, when the Lord is in conjunction with His Divine Consort. The Āḻvār can, therefore, hardly subsist without partaking of such unalloyed and unlimited bliss and yet, in his present state of separation from Him, he is even led to suspect whether all this glory, attributed to the Lord, is at all real or a mere figment of imagination. The doubt expressed by the Āḻvār earlier in this decad, was about the Lord's capacity to redeem His subjects. There at least, the Lord could escape by putting the blame on the supplicant's inadequacy, failings etc. But here, the Āḻvār is led to suspect even the basic feature of

the Lord, as the all-pervading, inner Controller of all things and beings, said to be but His modes or attributes.

maṇanta pēr āyā! māyattāl muḻutum
valviṉaiyēṉai īrkiṉṟa
kuṇaṅkaḷai uṭaiyāy! acurar vaṉ kaiyar
kūṟṟamē! koṭiya puḷ uyarttāy!
paṇaṅkaḷ āyiramum uṭaiya pain nākap
palliyāy! pāṟkaṭal cērppā!
vaṇaṅkumāṟu aṟiyēṉ-maṉamum, vācakamum,
ceykaiyum, yāṉum nī-tāṉē. (VIII–1–8)

Translation

Mighty Gopāla, Piṉṉai, You did wed with love intense,
Your auspicious traits, in their full complement, tear into halve.
This sinner great, deadly unto the mighty Asuras, You have
On Your banner Garuḍa, who does on them miseries impose,
In the Milk-ocean, on the thousand-hooded serpent You repose;
I and my mind, word and deed are all swayed by You,
And so, I know not how I can, on my own, worship You.

Notes

(i) The Aḻvār would appear to have been pulled up by the Lord as to why he did not even make a formal obeisance to Him. The Āḻvār clears up the position by pointing out that, as one who belongs to Him, lock, stock and barrel, and is wholly dominated by Him, even this formal act of bowing has to be ordained by Him.

(ii) The very traits of the Lord, which do sustain the devotees, are proving injurious to the Āḻvār in his present disconsolate state, making his separation from the Lord all the more poignant. The Āḻvār attributes this mental state to his sins. Wounds inflicted by missiles could be cured but not the sickness imposed by the Lord's traits themselves. The ungodly Asuras are destroyed by the Lord's weapons but His auspicious traits,

strangely enough, torment the devout like Saint Nammāḻvār, as he puts it in this song, splitting him into halves, even as Hiraṇya was cleaved by Lord Narasimha.

(iii) Ādi-Śeṣa, the Lord's serpent-bed, can, on his spacious bosom, accommodate the Lord and His Consorts; his thousand hoods spread themselves out and dance with great joy because of his contact with the Lord.

(iv) Mind, body and speech of the sentient being are the Lord's gifts, capacitating the individual for worshipping Him and yet, the Āḻvār could not, on his own, bow unto the Lord, because he and his appendages, the mind etc., are all wholly dominated by Him. This is indeed the farthest limit of self-abnegation, totally objuring the element of self-effort, (Sādhana yogyatā), that is, employing 'Means' other than the Lord Himself.

yānum nī-tāṉē āvatō meyyē,
    aṟu naraku-avaiyum nī; āṉāl,
vāṉ uyar iṉpam eytil eṉ? maṟṟai
    narakamē eytil eṉ? eṉiṉum,
yāṉum nī-tāṉāyt teḷitoṟum, naṉṟum
    añcuvaṉ narakam nāṉ aṭaital;
vāṉ uyar iṉpam maṉṉi vīṟṟiruntāy!—
    aruḷu niṉ tāḷkaḷai eṉakkē. (VIII–1–9)

Translation

True it is, You are in me as You are in everything else,
The hell of a life I now eke out is also Yours;
So then, it matters not whether You grant me heavenly bliss
Or keep me lingering in this hellish life, full of distress.
And yet, life here I dread when I do my essential nature realise,
I beseech you, therefore, oh Lord, seated in the blissful heaven!
To bless me that I do your lovely feet attain.

Note

To those gifted with the vision of the Lord's Universal Form (Viśvarūpa), like Prahlāda and Nammāḻvār, it should indeed be possible to perceive the presence of the Lord everywhere, looking upon Hell and Heaven alike, with perfect mental equanimity. The doubt, therefore, arises why the Āḻvār abhors existence over here and aspires for his ascent to Heaven, exhibiting a distinct predilection for the latter. This song clears up the position in this regard. It is the corroding, rather, the corrupting influence of life in the midst of the worldlings with its potential risk of seriously interfering with his essential nature, as the exclusive vassal of the Lord solely dependent on Him, that scares the Āḻvār and frightens him to such an extent. No wonder, therefore that he longs for his quick ascent to Heaven where the Lord can be served and enjoyed in that transcendent setting, without break and fear of contamination of any sort.

tāḷkaḷai eṉakkē talaittalaic ciṟappat
    tanta pēr utavik kaimmāṟāt
tōḷkaḷai ārat taḻuvi, eṉ uyirai
    aṟa vilai ceytaṉaṉ-cōtī!
tōḷkaḷ āyirattāy! muṭikaḷ āyirattāy;
    tuṇaimalark kaṇkaḷ āyirattāy!
tāḷkaḷ āyirattāy! pērkaḷ āyirattāy!
    tamiyaṉēṉ periya appaṉē! (VIII–1–10)

Translation

With pleasure great, my Soul I have unto You, sold, sure and certain,
Oh, resplendent Lord, this is indeed in return
For the unflinching faith in Your feet, You have on me bestowed;
Shoulders many, crowns in plenty and a vast multitude
Of lotus eyes and feet many, I see in You, bearing names many,
My Sire, I know you intend showering on poor me favours many.

Notes

(i) Although the Lord has still not obliged the Āḻvār with His presence, the latter is jubilant that he has not been contaminated by the worldlings and the Lord's lovely feet are unto him what food and raiment are for the worldlings. This is indeed a great favour done to the

Āḻvār by the great Lord, who has not only made the Āḻvār abhor and abjure the ways of the world but also look upon the Lord as his Sole Sustainer. What is even more, He has chosen the Āḻvār for singing these hymns of 'Tiruvāymoḻi' without giving this special assignment even to sages of the eminence of Vālmīki, Vyāsa and Parāśara or the first three Āḻvārs, a piece of special favour, a great felicity, already acknowledged by the Āḻvār in the earlier decad. For this benefaction, the Āḻvār now seeks to recompense the Lord by offering Him his soul, like unto a father putting his arms round the shoulders of his daughter and giving her away in marriage to the bridegroom. In the exuberance of his joy, the Āḻvār seems to have coolly overlooked past history in this regard, his own earlier attempt to barter away his soul, thwarted by an almost immediate realisation that he was trying to give away the Lord's own, under the erroneous belief that it was his own. Well, even as recently as in the eighth stanza of this very decad, the Āḻvār was conscious of the fact that he, his mind, word, and deed were all swayed by Him and that he had nothing to do with these.

(ii) Even as the Āḻvār delightfully made a confounded gift of a thing that didn't belong to him, the Lord received it with great jubilation, as if it did not already belong to Him, beamed with joy and expanded marvellously by way of expressing His great joy, exhibiting thousands of shoulders, crowns, eyes, feet etc. This is on a par with the Kṣatrya Kings, in exultation over a great turn of events in their lives, sharing their joy with their favourite queens, in amorous company.

periya appaṉai, piramaṉ appaṉai,
uruttiraṉ appaṉai, muṉivarkku
uriya appaṉai, amarar appaṉai,
ulakukku ōr taṉi appaṉ-taṉṉai
periya vaṇ kurukūr vaṇ caṭakōpaṉ
pēṇiṉa āyirattuḷḷum
uriya col-mālai ivaiyum pattu ivaṟṟāl
uyyalām, toṇṭīr!—naṅkaṭkē. (VIII–1–11)

Translation

Ye, devotees, salvation we can all attain, reciting these songs ten,
Out of the choice thousand composed by Kurukūr Caṭakōpaṉ,
Adoring the peerless Lord of the Universe, of unique grandeur,
The great Sire of Piramaṉ, Uruthiraṉ and the worthy Master
Of illustrious sages like Sanaka and the Devas, one and all.

Note

This end-song epitomises the contents of this decad and avers that those who recite this decad will attain salvation, even though they have been immersed for ages in sensual pleasures, straying away from God-head.

(Piramaṉ = Brahmā; Uruttiraṉ = Rudra)

Eighth Centum—Second decad (VIII-2)
(Naṅkaḷ varivaḷai)

Preamble

In the last decad, the Āḻvār began to suspect that, with his coming into the world, the Lord's reputation as the repository of many an auspicious trait and the grand ordainer of all things, was becoming extinct. The Āḻvār was, however, brought back to normal thinking by the Lord and the Āḻvār's misgivings were cleared up in a way. But then, the external perception of the Lord's exquisite Form and physical contact, longed for by the Saint, did not, as yet, materialise. This, therefore, gave rise to yet another doubt in the mind of the Āḻvār whether the Lord was keeping away from him on the ground that he was still not quite free from worldly desires. No doubt, the Āḻvār kept himself studiously aloof from the world and its meretritious charms, as far as he could be conscious of it. And yet, the Omni-Scient Lord might have found traces of worldly desires still lurking inside the Āḻvār unknown to him, and this was perhaps the reason why the Lord was holding back. The Āḻvār, therefore, thought of clearing up even this inkling of a doubt and vindicating his absolute detachment from the world and its affairs, but did not open up a direct dialogue with the Lord. Instead, he resorted to the device of informing the Lord and impressing upon

Him through argumentation between the Nāyakī and her mates and elders, the theme of the dialogue being as follows:

The Nāyakī (Āḻvār) who got separated from the Supreme Lord after her erstwhile union with Him cannot contain herself and patiently await His return. She, therefore, darts forth, in an attempt to meet her Lord in His dwelling place in the yonder region but gets pulled up by her mates for transgression of the norms of feminine conduct and the restraint of modesty which it imposes. The mates counsel patience but it falls on deaf ears. The Nāyakī sternly declines to conform to the so-called norms of the worldlings, being on a pedestal of her own, totally dissociating herself from all things ungodly and fierecely concentrating on her Lord, with no other thought, crossing her mind.

Against this background, the key stanzas of this decad are the seventh, eighth and the eleventh.

naṅkaḷ varivaḷai āyaṅkāḷō!
nammuṭai ētalar muṉpu nāṇi,
nuṅkaṭku yāṉ oṉṟu uṟaikkum māṟṟam
nōkkukiṉṟēṉ; eṅkum kāṇa māṭṭēṉ;
caṅkam carintaṉa, cāy iḻantēṉ;
taṭa mulai poṉ niṟamāyt taḷarntēṉ-
veṅkaṉ paṟavaiyiṉ pākaṉ eṅkōṉ
vēṅkaṭavāṇaṉai vēṇṭic ceṉṟē. (VIII-2-1)

Translation

Ye, my mates, bedecked with bangles nice,
I wish I could in you confide and freely tell
What unto hostile elders I feel shy to disclose,
And yet, words I find not, my thoughts to spell;
My Lord at Tiruvēṅkaṭam Who conducts the bird
With hot eyes, I desired to see and lo! lose I did
My complexion fine, down the wrists my bangles slid,
With the colour off my breasts, I just became jaded.

Notes

(i) Finding the Nāyakī off colour and debilitated, her mates enquired of her what was going wrong with her. The Nāyakī felt shy to disclose her love-sickness but her friendly mates could put her at ease. Even then, words failed her and, at long last, she gave out the genesis of her malady, as above.

(ii) The bangles would not rest on the wrists of the Nāyakī, grown gaunt and emaciated, while the mates had their bangles, *in tact*. Even as Lakṣmaṇa, whose grief over Sītā's abduction, stemming from a stinging sense of unwariness on his part, was even greater than Śrī Rāma's, steadied himself so as to be fit to serve Śrī Rāma all right, the mates here had to keep themselves fit, in order to bring the Nāyakī round, instead of lamenting along with her.

(iii) The elders have absolute faith in the Lord's grace, which is bound to lead them on to the final goal without fail. They would, therefore, counsel the Nāyakī to coolly await the descent of the Lord's grace at His sweet will, without getting jittery. This kind of advice is, however, unpalatable to the Nāyakī, who is all agog for the quick consummation of her inordinate God-love and hence, the elders are deemed by her to be hostile. And now, hostility is of two kinds, the inner and the outer, as brought out in aphorism 139 of 'Acārya Hrudayam'. Those, who employ 'means' other than the Lord Himself to attain Him, are regarded as the external enemies while those who look upon God as the 'Ready Means', the 'Siddhopāya', and yet remain opposed to getting into a state of flutter and throbbing for quick consummation, on the ground that it militates against the creed of 'Pāratantrya' (exclusive dependence on the Lord), are categorised by the Nāyakī as the internal enemies.

(iv) *Garuḍa, the hot-eyed bird*:

Garuḍa, being hot-eyed, is, at times, favourable, and unfavourable at other times, depending upon the particular mood of the God-lover. This mighty bird could quell the ungodly with blistering looks and fly the Lord unerringly down to where the Nāyakī is eagerly awaiting

His arrival. The Nāyakī would then thank Garuḍa for his good offices. The same Nāyakī would, however, speak disparagingly of the bird, when he takes away the Lord from her and leaves her sadly alone, as in her present state of 'Viśleṣa' (separation). This is just like the Gopis (the damsels of Virundāvan) dubbing the saintly Akrūra as the one with a cruel heart, who separated them from Kṛṣṇa and took Him to Kamsa's citadel (Mathurā)—'Akrūraḥ Krūrahrudayaḥ'.

(v) The Lord has some down all the way from Heaven to Mount Tiruvēṅkatam, to be beheld by us all. He has not come to the Nāyakī and so, she thought of going up to this holy centre, specially courted by Him. But these are the changes instantly wrought in her—the sliding down of the bangles, loss of complexion and all that.

vēṇṭic ceṉṟu oṉṟu peṟukiṟpāril
ennuṭait tōḻiyar nuṅkaṭkēlum,
iṉṟu itu uraikkum paṭiyai, antō!
kāṇkiṉṟilēṉ-iṭarāṭṭiyēṉ nāṉ;
kāṇ taku tāmaraik kaṇṇaṉ kaḷvaṉ,
viṇṇavar-kōṉ, naṅkaḷ kōṉaik kaṇṭāl,
īṇṭiya caṅkum niṟaivum koḷvāṉ
ettaṉai kālam iḷaikkiṉṟēṉē! (VIII–2–2)

Translation

Alas! I know not, in my present state of woe,
What to say of me even unto You, my mates dear!
Who would from me always get whatever you desire;
Were I to see the lotus-eyed Lord, bewitching to behold,
Who by His looks could our hearts steal, the Sovereign Lord
Of the Celestials and us alike, I can unto me get restored
My bangles and modesty and for this I am since long trying hard.

Note

Ever since the Lord withdrew Himself from the Nāyakī's vision, she has been without her bangles which slid down her wrists, and the innate sense of modesty, characteristic of women under restraint. It is only when she gets the vision back again, she can hope to get back her lost possessions. It is a pity, she is still in a state of longing, with fulfilment nowhere in sight.

kālam iḷaikkil allāl, viṉaiyēṉ
nāṉ iḷaikkiṉṟilaṉ; kaṇṭukoḷmiṉ;
ñālam aṟiyap paḻi cumantēṉ,
nal-nutalīr! iṉi nāṇit tāṉ eṉ—
nīla malar neṭum cōti cūḻnta
niṉṟa mukil vaṇṇaṉ, kaṇṇaṉ koṇṭa
kōla vaḷaiyoṭu māmai koḷvāṉ,
ettaṉai kālamum kūṭac ceṉṟē? (VIII–2–3)

Translation

I am in endless pursuit of Kaṇṇaṉ, my cloud-hued Lord,
Of limitless blue, beaming far and wide, to get unto me restored,
My bangles lovely and complexion fair; Indeed, the whole world
Blames me for transgression of my bounds, Ye, mates with foreheads bright.
There's no use my fighting shy anymore, please note;
This sinner will persevere and me Time can never beat.

Note

Apart from the crowning trait of modesty for women, as a class, the 'Prapanna', who pursues the path of loving surrender to the Lord's voluntary grace, has to await the descent of such grace at the time deemed appropriate by the Lord, with absolute faith in Him, a robust confidence. It is this very plank, the mates also stand upon and so, they try to bring round the Nāyakī. But the Nāyakī says, she has become brazen, after all the notoriety and opprobrium she has earned by dint of her sending the birds and bees as emissaries (I-4) and her attempt to come into the open and arraign the Lord for His cruel unresponsiveness (V-3). She is determined to try till the end of time and get back her bangles, the external possession, and modesty, the internal

decoration, stolen away from her by the Lord of exquisite charm. This is, as it were, a challenge to the mates who advised the Nāyakī to give up her futile pursuit, right now, instead of acknowledging defeat at a later date, after a long and strenuous struggle.

kūṭac ceṉṟēṉ-iṉi eṉ koṭukkēṉ?
kōlvaḷai, neñcat toṭakkam ellām
pātu aṟṟu oḷiya iḷantu, vaikal
palvaḷaiyārmuṉ paricu aḻintēṉ—
māṭak koṭi mātiḷ teṉ kuḷantai
vaṉ kuṭapāl niṉṟa māyak kūttaṉ
āṭal paṟavai uyartta vel pōr
āḻivalavaṉai ātarittē. (VIII–2–4)

Translation

Court did I Lord Māyakkūttaṉ, borne aloft by the gay bird,
Enshrined in the western part of Teṉkuḷantai with castles tall
And stately walls, Who the victorious disc does wield,
And lost my bangles lovely, my mind, one and all;
Indeed I have nothing more to lose, having lost, long back,
My feminine bearing, in the eyes of the women wearing bangles, in bulk.

Notes

(i) This song brings out the Āḻvār's adoration of Māyakkūttaṉ, the Deity enshrined in Tenkuḷantai, popularly known as Peruṅkuḷam, near Āḻvār Tirunakari (Kurukūr), the birthplace of the Saint.

(ii) *Māyakkūttaṉ*: This could either refer to Lord Kṛṣṇa's vast array of wondrous deeds, performed during the brief span of His advent over here, right in the middle of the rituals performed by the Celestials in the yonder Heaven, as part of their diurnal worship of the Lord in His transcendent Form.

or

Generally, the Lord who binds us to this body, like unto a bird's nest and watches all the fun and frolic that follow.

(iii) Garuḍa flutters its wings with hilarious joy, in contemplation of the prospective outing of the Lord mounted on him.

(iv) When the mates chide the Nāyakī that, by her daring she stood to lose all her possessions, one by one, she replies that there is nothing more to lose, having already lost her all.

āḻivalavaṉai ātarippum,
āṅku avaṉ nammil varavum ellām,
tōḻiyarkāḷ! nam uṭaiyamētāṉ?
colluvatō iṅku ariyatutāṉ—
ūḻitōṟu ūli, oruvaṉāka
naṉku uṇarvārkkum uṇaralākāc
cūḻal uṭaiya cuṭark koḷ ātit
tollai am cōti niṉaikkuṅkālē? (VIII–2–5)

Translation

Ye, mates, it would hardly be proper to say things harsh

About the Lord wielding the discus, the Primate of brilliance everlasting,
Of ultra-mundane origin, of wondrous deeds which the devotees enthral,
Whose glory even the most knowledgeable can't fathom and comprehend,
However much and however long they might try to find;
'Tis nothing new for devotees to covet Him and for Him to respond.

Notes

(i) Trying to convict the Nāyakī out of her own mouth, the mates advise her not to court the Lord and lose all her possessions in the process, as owned by her in the immediately preceding song. Pat comes the admonition from the Nāyakī, warning them against any possible misunderstanding of the Lord's glory and greatness and dubbing Him as callous, hard-hearted and so on. It was not as if she was the only God-lover, subject to

such fluctuations. There have been very many God-lovers before, who did covet the Lord's presence and craved, like Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī, for incessant communion with Him and the Lord also graciously responded and mingled with the devout very freely, exhibiting many wonderful traits and deeds.

(ii) The statement that intellectual stalwarts too cannot comprehend the Lord, even if they should engage themselves in such pursuit for ages, might seem to come into conflict with the texts, such as, 'Vedāhametaṁ Puruṣaṁ Mahāntaṁ', 'Aham vedmi Mahātmānaṁ' etc., which claim to know God. The authority to whom these texts apply is what is called the Brahma-Jñāni or 'Tattva vith', the knower of Brahman, the ultimate Principle or Truth. Well, all that these eminent persons could know is that the Lord cannot be fully comprehended and His ways are inscrutable. For example, the Lord Himself has declared many a time that He would act only when Mahālakṣmī plays the recommendatory role, mediating and pleading for the supplicants at the door-step. And yet, He would also say, 'Nāsou Puruṣakāreṇa nacāpyanyena hetunā, Kevalaṁ svecchāyaivāhaṁ prekṣa kancit Kathācana', that is, He could not be coaxed into redeeming His subjects by any means including the mediation of the Divine Mother and that His own will was paramount, in the matter of extending His grace. Again, He has declared, in unambiguous terms His severe displeasure in regard to the transgression of the dictates of the Scriptures, which are but His commands—'Śrutis Śmrutir Mamaivajña yasth āmullangya vartate, āgnāccheti Mama dhrohi Madbhaktopi na vaiṣnavah'. And yet, in Chapter IX-30 of Bhagavad Gita, this stern warning would seem to have got totally diluted, when Lord Kṛṣṇa averred, "apicet suduråcārah bhajate Mām ananya bhāk, Sādhureva samantavyaḥ Samyagvyavasito hi saḥ", that is, "Even he, who has committed grave breaches of the codes of conduct, appropriate to the different stations in life, deserves to be placed on a par with a Saint and honoured likewise, if he meditates on Me, with selfless devotion, with no other end in view." Did not Lord Rāma wind up the heated debate on Vibhīṣaṇa's admission into His camp, by announcing His great creed of granting asylum to any one, who sought refuge in Him and responding, without fail, to the call of a destitute, be he friendly or a foe in the guise of a friend, and whatever be the magnitude of his sins? How then can anyone, however exalted and sagacious, claim to have known fully, the Lord and His ways? The only exception could, of course, be the chosen few unto whom the Lord has revealed Himself, *in toto*, and imparted crystal-clear knowledge, shorn of all doubts, discrepancies and deviations.

(iii) The Nāyakī's hopes are kept alive because the Great One, Who baffles scrutiny and defies description, is also known to be amazingly simple, mixing freely with His ardent devotees. How then can the mates dissuade the Nāyakī from pinning her faith in His condescending love?

tollai am cōti niṉaikkuṅkāl, eṉ
 col aḷavu aṉṟu; imaiyōr-tamakkum
ellai ilātaṉa kūḻppuc ceyyum;
 at tiṟam niṟka-em māmai koṇṭāṉ;
alli malart taṉ tuḷāyum tārāṉ-
 ārkku iṭukō iṉip pūcal? collīr!—
valli vaḷa vayal cūḻ kuṭantai
 mā malarkkaṇ vaḷarkiṉṟa mālē. (VIII–2–6)

Translation

Tell me, my mates, to whom else I shall my woes depose,
When the resplendent Lord of prowess extra-ordinary, much beyond the grasp
Of even Celestials, the Great one of amazing grandeur, Who does repose
In Tirukkuṭantai amid nice gardens and fields fertile, who did grab
My complexion fair but wouldn't favour me with tuḷaci garland, full of fragrance.

Notes

(i) The mates would appear to have been prodding the Nâyakī, saying that the Lord is indeed dear to attain and not the easily accessible one, as she was making out. The Nâyakī, however, effectivey silences them by pointing out that it matters not whether He is near or far, seeing that He has kept her mind solely fixed on Him. And, in this state of mind, the Nāyakī sees no other way but to be a supplicant at His door-step, instead of hanging on to those with whom she has nothing to do. As a matter of fact, it would not be possible even to the exalted Celestials like Brahmā and Rudra to define the Lord's stance with any degree of certainty. He, who is beyond reach some times, is the most easily attainable at other times, and the doubt, therefore, assails the minds of one and all, high and low, as to what the Lord would be like, at any one time. In the 'Mokśa Dharma' of Mahābhārata, Brahmā said unto Rudra, that none, including them, could fathom the infinite Mind of the Lord and plumb its mysterious depths.

(ii) Such a Great one condescended to reveal His exquisite Form unto the Nâyakī and steal away her heart, as evidenced by the discoloration that has set in. During those moments of His union with the Nayaki, He was totally subservient to her but now that He keeps aloof of her, He would not care to give her even the tuḷaci garland worn on His person, which could, to some extent, alleviate her suffering. Even so, it behoves her to wait at His door-step only, whatever be His dispensation, good, bad or indifferent, because of the inalienable link between the two.

mâl, ari, kēcavaṉ, nāraṇaṉ, cīmâtavaṉ,
 kōvintaṉ, vaikuntaṉ eṉṟu eṉṟu
ōlamiṭa eṉṉaip paṇṇi, viṭṭiṭṭu,
 oṉṟum uruvum cuvaṭum kāṭṭāṉ;
ēla malarkkuḻal aṉṉaimīrkāḷ!
 eṉṉuṭait tōḻiyarkāḷ! eṉ ceykēṉ?
kālam pala ceṉṟum kāṇpatu-āṇai;
 uṅkaḷōṭu eṅkaḷ iṭai illaiyē. (VIII–2–7)

Translation

Ye, elders, with fragrant locks, flower-bedecked, Ye, my mates,
His names, my Lord has made me cry out,
As Māl, Ari, Kēcavaṉ, Nāraṇaṉ, Cīmātavaṉ, Kōvintaṉ,
 Vaikuṇṭaṉ, and so on,
But of Him no trace could I see; what shall be done?
Till the end of time, struggle shall I, on and on
And see Him, sure and certain, let me swear,
There's indeed no link 'tween you and me. I am sure.

Notes

(i) Even when the Lord keeps aloof, the subject cannot help pining for Him and uttering His sweet names, expressive of His auspicious attributes and wondrous deeds, as the sole means of subsistence. That is why Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī resent the advice tendered by her mates, not to attempt the unattainable but stay quiet. She would rather cut away from her kith and kin who can't see eye to eye with her. (See the concluding para of the preamble to this decad) The Lord (Tirumāl) known to possess boundless love for His devotees, cannot keep away from them for long; He is Ari (Hari) the destroyer of all our sins which impede our union with Him; He is Keśava, whose dark, curly locks entrance the devotees and He should be fully aware that the Nāyakī would be musing over this sheer beauty, all the time; and then, He is Nārāyaṇā, of tender solicitude for the devotees, 'Aśṛtavatsala' and also 'Mādhava' (Cirīmātavaṉ) Who, by reason of His conjunction with the Divine Mother (Śrī), would never give up the devotees; He is Kōvintaṉ (Govinda) Who subserves those that take refuge in Him and all these qualities only go to embellish His transcendent glory as 'Vaikuntaṉ' residing in that super-eminent abode, known as Heaven.

(ii) Although the Nāyakī called out the Lord's names lustily, yet, He was nowhere in sight. When Bharata went to the forest to meet Śrī Rāma, the former could locate the latter's residence with the aid of the smoke that shot up in the sky from the ritual-fire. But, in the Nāyakī's

case, currently there is no trace whatever of the Lord nor any clue regarding His whereabouts.

iṭai illai-yāṉ vaḷartta kiḷikāḷ!
  pūvaikaḷkāḷ! kuyilkāḷ! mayilkāḷ!-
uṭaiya nam māmaiyum, caṅkum, neñcum,
  oṉṟum oḷiya oṭṭātu koṇṭāṉ;
aṭaiyum vaikuntamum, pāṟkaṭalum,
  añcaṉa veṟpum avai naṇiya;
kaṭaiyaṟap pācaṅkaḷ viṭṭapiṉṉai
  aṉṟi, avaṉ avai kāṇkoṭāṉē. (VIII-2-8)

Translation

Ye, parrots, peacocks, Koels, little Pūvai birds, my pets all,
There's nothing more you can from me have, my possessions, one and all,
The Lord has from me snatched 'tis, however, not difficult to attain hence
Vaikuntam, Milk-ocean, Mount Añcaṉam and other holy centres,
But these the Lord reveals not unless one sheds the last shred
Of attachment unto things in the domain outside.

Notes

(i) The main theme of this decad being complete eschewal of, and total dissociation from all things ungodly, this is yet another topical stanza of the decad. (See also stanza 7)

(ii) The pets were reared up by the Nāyakī merely as ancillary to her God-enjoyment, by way of heightening the enjoyment and now, in her present state of separation from her beloved Lord, all these birds are of no avail and the Nāyakī doesn't hesitate to sever her connection with these unwanted pets, in the same way as she stands apart from her mates and the elders who tempt her the wrong way. A doubt might, however, arise, at this stage, how these birds, which are said to denote the great preceptors (Ācāryās), as elucidated earlier, could at all be discarded notwithstanding their exalted position

as the sure Guides to Heaven. As a matter of fact, in Saint Rāmānuja's swan-song, 'Śaraṇāgati gadya', he specifically includes even the preceptors in the category of persons, dear and near, excluded by him, 'Gurūn santyajya'. The idea behind this is that one's parents, wife, sons, relations, friends and preceptor, loved and adored, as belonging to the Lord, have also to be eschewed, if they turned out to be inimical to God-enjoyment. Vide also aphorism 153 of 'Ācārya Hrudayam'.

(iii) The Lord having forsaken the Nāyakī after His erstwhile union with her, He has simultaneously deprived her of her fair complexion, bangles, mind and all, which He has taken with Him to the yonder Heaven, thinking that it is much beyond the Nāyakī's reach. But the Nāyakī is well aware that the Heaven is not that remote and unattainable, being, as a matter of fact, the destined Land, the ultimate destination of every one, which the Super-sensitive Lord shall, however, make available only when the earthly desires and sensual pleasures are given up in toto and one loves Him exclusively. Mount Añcaṉam, mentioned in this song, is Mount Tiruvēṅkaṭam. This holy centre and the Milk-ocean are held on a par with Heaven.

kāṇkoṭuppāṉ allaṉ ārkkum taṉṉai;
  kaicey appālatu ōr māyam-taṉṉāl
māṇ kuṟaḷ kōla vaṭivu kāṭṭi,
  maṇṇum viṇṇum niṟaiya malarnta
cēṇ cuṭart tōḷkaḷ pala taḷaitta
  tēvā-piṟāṟku eṉ niṟaiviṉōṭu
nāṉ koṭuttēṉ:iṉi eṉ koṭukkēṉ?—
  eṉṉuṭai nal-nutal naṅkaimīrkāḷ? (VIII-2-9)

Translation

My mates with foreheads bright, I have to lose nothing more,
Having my feminity lost and with that, my sense of modesty

Unto the Lord of the Celestials, with shoulders many, bright and
 hefty,
Who the most exalted eludes and remains unseen but did
 appear before (Bali), as the unique Vāmana, charming
 beyond compare,
And did from him snatch, on the sly, all the worlds,
Earth, Svarga and all, which He did span and pervade.

Notes

(i) The Nāyakī averred in the preceding song that the Lord would certainly grant admission to His transcendent abode, if we unreservedly gave up attachment to all things ungodly. She was hit back by the mates, who said that all that the Nāyakī could do was to sever her connections with them and go on losing all her possessions, one by one, but she would never gain the Lord, she longed for, at such great cost. And now, the Nāyakī says that she has nothing more to lose, having already lost her feminine bearing itself, along with modesty, its essential ingredient. She has thus lost both her priceless kingdoms, whereas the Lord restored to Indra, his lost kingdom, getting it back from Mahābali. The Nāyakī and Bali sail in the same boat, both having lost their respective kingdoms, enthralled by the Lord's exquisite charm. Even so, Bali won everlasting fame as a great donor.

(ii) The Lord would not reveal Himself to those, who seek to gain His presence, by dint of their own efforts, however exalted they might be. So far as the Nāyakī is concerned, she has been enthralled by His bewitching beauty, which He revealed unto her and, in the process, He has stolen away her heart and all, even as He appeared before Mahābali, as the exquisite Vāmana and snatched away all his possessions. The shoulders and the entire frame of the Lord's person went on expanding

the moment Bali poured water into His right palm, betokening his gift unto the Lord of what was sought of him.

eṉṉuṭai nal-nutal naṅkaimīrkāḷ!
 yāṉ iṉic ceyvatu eṉ-eṉ nēñcu eṉṉai
niṉ iṭaiyēṉ allēṉ eṉṟu nīṅki,
 nēmiyum caṅkum irukaik koṇṭu,
pal neṭum cūḻ cuṭar ñāyiṟṟōṭu
 pāl mati ēnti, ōr kōla nīla
nal neṭum kuṉṟam varuvatu oppāṉ
 naḷ-malarp pātam aṭaintatuvē? (VIII–2–10)

Translation

My mates with foreheads bright, me my mind has forsaken
And attained the lovely feet, like unto lotus in fresh bloom,
Of the Lord, Who does the conch and discus wield and gleam
Like a lovely blue mountain, tall and mobile, bearing on its
 crown
The effulgent Sun with multiple rays besides the silvery moon;
What then can I do, thus dispossessed of my mind?

Notes

(i) The elders coaxed the Nāyakī, saying that they are the persons really interested in her well-being and she was, therefore, bound to listen to their advice. But the Nāyakī felt helpless, having become totally unreceptive and impervious to advice of any kind, in the absence of her mind, which has already crossed over to the Lord and taken shelter at His lovely feet, much beyond her reach, at the moment.

(ii) The hefty Lord of bluish tint is like unto a gigantic blue emerald mountain, tall and lovely; His holding the radiant discus and the white conch looks like the Sun and the Moon rising on the crest of a blue mountain simultaneously, a phenomenon which can hardly be noticed, except in the person of the Lord and is thus as unique as the Lord Himself.

pātam aṭaivataṉ pācattālē maṟṟavaṉ
pācaṅkaḷ muṟṟa viṭṭu,
kōtu il pukaḻk kaṇṇaṉ-tan aṭimēl
vaṇ kurukūrc caṭakōpaṉ coṉṉa
tītu il antāti ōr āyirattuḷ
ivaiyum ōr pattu icaiyoṭum vallār
ātum ōr tītu ilar āki, iṅkum
aṅkum ellām amaivārkaḷ tāmē. (VIII-2-11)

Translation

Those that sing tunefully these ten songs unique,
Out of the flawless thousand, graciously, composed by Caṭakōpaṉ
Of Kurukūr, who to attain Lord Kaṇṇaṉ's feet was very keen
And adored His glory immaculate, shedding all desires, alien
To the cherished goal, will from blemishes of all kinds be absolved
And enjoy the best of all good things, here and abroad.

Notes

(i) The end-stanza gives out the benefit accruing from the tuneful chanting of this decad, namely, God-enjoyment, both here and in the yonder Heaven, *completely purged of all grossness and worldly desires*. The portion underlined is the key-note of this decad. As a matter of fact, these chanters will gain unique prominence, both in this world and the yonder heaven.

(ii) By the immaculate glory of the Lord is meant that, by meditating upon which one cannot entertain any other desire. Should the two, however, go hand-in-hand, it shall indeed be a reflection on the self-sufficiency of the Lord's glory for one's exclusive enjoyment and will thus constitute a blemish. The flawlessness of this hymnal of Nammāḻvār and its exclusive excellence, rather incomparable excellence, have already been brought out at the appropriate places, and do not, therefore, need repetition.

Eighth Centum—Third Decad (VIII-3)
(Aṅkum iṅkum)

Preamble

It was indeed a grand poetic imagery of the Āḻvār, conjuring up the vision of the Lord, as an emerald mountain, tall and lovely, moving along, bearing on its crest the radiant Sun and the silvery Moon, all at once vide VIII-2-10. The Āḻvār could not lift his mind off this spectacular grandeur and, at the same time, this made him apprehensive of the safety of the Lord, so charming, who in this exquisite Form, moves about alone and unattended in this wicked world peopled by the ungodly and the selfish. The Āḻvār, felt vexed that there was none else to share his anxiety in this regard. While the Celestials in Heaven are soaked in 'Brahmānubhava', drinking deep of that perennial nectarean spring, namely, the Lord in that glorious transcendent setting, the worldlings are engrossed with sensual pleasures, Brahmā and other Devas would not hesitate to secure their selfish ends involving the Lord in battling against the ungodly Asurās and making Him the target of the arrows of the hostile hordes. When the Saint voiced forth his fear, as above, the Lord set him at ease, by pointing out that there was hardly any room for such fears, surrounded as He always is by the 'Nityās', 'Muktās' and the devout seekers of salvation. The Āḻvār then regains his composure, rid of his erstwhile fears. The initial disquietitude is reflected in the third song of this decad and its clearance is revealed in the tenth song.

aṅkum iṅkum, vāṉavar tāṉavar, yāvarum,
eṅkum iṉaiyai eṉṟu uṇṇai aṟiyakilātu, alaṟṟi,
aṅkam cērum-pūmakaḷ, maṇmakaḷ, āymakaḷ-
caṅku cakkarak kaiyavaṉ eṉpar caraṇamē. (VIII-3-1)

Translation

The Vāṉavar, Tāṉavar and all else, here, there and everywhere,
Can hardly comprehend You but reckon You, in their own way,
Merely as their Saviour, in times of need,
The one, who the conch and discus wields
And does on His person the triple Consorts Divine hold.

Notes

The highest love to God is love rendered for God's sake, love culminating in benediction or glorification of God. Love, so disinterestedly rendered, is love of purity and virginity and, under its influence, what is uppermost in the mind of the devotee is the Lord's remarkable tenderness (Saukumārya) and bewitching beauty and he grows apprehensive of the Lord's safety and seeks His well-being. This is what the Āḻvār would expect of every votary of the Lord but, on a close scrutiny, he was shocked to find the votaries in all ranks, the Devas known to be friendly to God, the Asuras, inimical to the Devas and the humans falling under numerous categories, one and all of them, praying to the Lord only for making good all their deficiencies and bestowing on them the felicity they lack. None of them is found to bear any love to God for God's sake, in the manner indicated at the outset. The glorious setting in which the Divine consorts are borne on the Lord's winsome chest and the manner in which the white conch and the radiant discus are gracefully held in His hands should make the true God-lover enjoy them all and become, in turn, apprehensive of the Lord's safety, ever alert to the possible danger to the Lord's person, with a view to averting it. But these self-seekers look upon this very setting as conducive to their own well-being, to bestow choice gifts on them through the mediation of the Goddesses and protect them, with the discus and other weapons, whenever they are in trouble: The Āḻvār just abhors all such selfish persons seeking transient riches and expresses his abhorrence in this song, couched as an address to the Lord Himself.

caraṇam ākiya nāṉmaṟai nūlkaḷum cārātē,
maraṇam, tōṟṟam, vāṉ piṇi, mūppu eṉṟu ivai māyttōm-
karaṇap pal paṭai paṟṟu aṟa ōṭum kaṉal āḻi
araṇat tiṉ paṭai ēntiya īcaṟku aḷāēy. (VIII–3–2)

Translation

Alas! even those, who abjure the path the Vedas four prescribe
For acquiring riches, have their final goal circumscribed
By mere freedom from birth and death, pestilence and old age
And do not get themselves in service engaged
Of the Lord who the grand galaxy of protective weapons wields.

Note

In the preceding song, the Saint condemned those who hanker after the transient riches, instead of getting soley absorbed in God-love. And now, he speaks disparagingly of the 'Kevalas', those whose final goal is limited to mere emancipation from the terrific cycle of birth and death and remaining thereafter in disembodied state, lost for ever in that stupid self-enjoyment, thereby denying themselves the supreme bliss of serving the Lord in Heaven in that glorious setting. It is a great pity, these persons are not alive to their essential nature (Svarūpa), as the exclusive vassals of the Lord, bound to serve Him exclusively. And so, the Āḻvār can hardly muster strenth for the service of the Lord either from the ranks of the seekers of the so-called 'riches' or those of the 'Kevalas'.

āḷum āḷār; āḻiyum caṅkum cumappār tām;
vāḷum villum koṇṭu piṉ celvār maṟṟu illai;
tāḷum tōḷum kaikaḷai ārat toḻak kāṇēṉ;
nāḷum nāḷum nāṭuvaṉ aṭiyēṉ-ñālatte. (VIII–3–3)

Translation

Alas! there's none to attend on my Lord,
The conch and discus He Himself bears,
I see none following Him, carrying His bow and sword;
There's none to admire His lovely feet and sinewy shoulders
And worship Him to heart's fill and so, I do fear
His safety in this wicked world and Him I wish to follow.

Notes

(i) In the last two songs, the Āḻvār deplored his own loneliness, there being none to join him in whole-hearted and self-less service of the Lord. And now, he feels for the Lord's loneliness, there being no camp-follower to carry His weapons and attend on Him, with utter devotion, swayed by His exquisite charm.

(ii) The Āḻvār feels agitated, seeing that the Supreme Lord of the entire universe has not employed any one to attend on Him; deeply touched by His tenderness (saukumārya), the Āḻvār feels that the conch and discus might impose a great burden on Him and that He should, therefore, employ some one to carry them. Well, even if, as some would put it, the conch and the discus are the Lord's insignia and have to be necessarily borne by Him, why should not some one be pressed into service for carrying His sword and bow? As a matter of fact, during His incarnation as Śrī Rāma, there was Lakṣmaṇa to carry the bow and arrows and serve Him in every conceivable manner. But now, in His Iconic Form, ther is no such attendant and this depresses the Āḻvār, a great deal.

(iii) The Lord's majestic gait and His imposing shoulders are indeed so charming that one can't but pray that nothing untoward happened and marred the beauty, *par excellence*. And yet, the Āḻvār finds none in this wicked world, attracted to the Lord in this manner. That is why his fears are aggravated and this is particularly relevant in the context of the Lord's iconic manifestation in this notorious world of miscreants like Rāvaṇa, Kamsa and Duryodhana, each with his own machinations for harming the Lord during His avatāras as Rāma and Kṛṣṇa.

ñālam pōṉakam paṟṟi ōr muṟṟā uru āki,
ālam pēr ilai aṉṉavacamceyyum ammāṉē!
kālam pērvatu ōr kār iruḷ ūḻi ottu uḷatāl-uṉ
kōlam kār eḻil kāṇaluṟṟu, āḻum koṭiyēṟkē. (VIII–3–4)

Translation

Oh, Sire, as a tender babe, You did on a fig-leaf repose,
Bearing in Your stomach the entire Universe;
Feast I would on Your Form exquisite like unto a rain-cloud,
And when this Sinner is from it precluded,
A split-second seems an age like unto the longish night.

Note

The Lord allays the fears of the Āḻvār by pointing out to him, His role as the Protector of the whole Universe and reminding him of how He sustained all the worlds with their numerous contents, right inside His stomach, during the deluge. Instead of allaying the Āḻvār's fears, this episode only stirred up his thoughts in yet another direction, like unto a doting mother. On a vast expanse of water floats a tender fig-leaf on which reposes a tender babe and this babe holds in its stomach all the seven worlds with their massive contents. How incongruous and hence how frightful , the whole setting is! The Āḻvār can think of this babe only in terms of the turbulent One that slept in Yaśodhā's cradle, after getting fed by her. Whether it was the result of immaturity, the work of a mere babe, the Āḻvār kept wondering. Could not the Lord have assumed a gigantic Form, sprawling far and wide on an equally spacious platform, so as not to frighten God-lovers of the calibre of the Āḻvār? His boundless love unto the Lord makes him lose all perspective of time-sequence and the Lord's omnipotence itself, reducing Him to the abject position of a mere ward, under his loving protection. The Āḻvār's anxiety is whether the Divine Babe lying on a tender leaf, alone and unaided, might slip into the deep waters; at least there was Yaśodhā keeping constant vigil when He slept in the cradle, but now there is none beside the Babe (Īṭu.)

koṭiyār māṭak kōḷūr akattum, puḷiṅkuṭiyum
maṭiyātu iṉṉē nī tuyil mēvi makiḻntatu-tāṉ
aṭiyār allal tavirtta acaivō? aṉṟēl, ip
paṭi-tāṉ nīṇṭu tāviya acaivō? paṇiyāyē. (VIII–3–5)

Translation

How is it, my Lord, You lovingly repose and turn not this side or that,
In kōḷūr and Puḷiṅkuṭi where banners play on castles smart?
Is it due to the fatigue caused (during Your avatāras)
When you did many a feat perform to alleviate
Your devotees' sufferings or the one that did result

From the long strides you took to span the world immense?
Which it is, may You unto me disclose.

Notes

(i) Seeing the Āḻvār's disquietitude over His lying alone on a tender leaf during the deluge, the Lord hastens to reveal unto him a different setting altogether, pertaining to His Iconic Form where He is attended upon by the votaries in their full complement. Mention of just two pilgrim centres, in this song, should be taken as covering the numerous other pilgrim centres where the Lord is reposing on His serpent-bed, such as Śrīraṅgam, Tirumeyyam, Kaṭanmallai, Tiruppēr, Aṉpil, Tiruvekhā etc.

(ii) The banners are displayed on house tops in the pilgrim centres, as a measure of decoration. But, in the eyes of the Āḻvār, this looms as a potential danger, helping the ungodly to easily locate this centre and invade it, intent upon harming the Lord enshrined there. Actually, the Āḻvār would want the Lord to remain out of reach of the devilish folks, even as Lord Kṛṣṇa grew up as a babe and then as a boy, in studious seclusion, fearing Kamsa's machinations.

(iii) The Lord, in His perfect Iconic Form, is seen reposing in the aforementioned pilgrim centres, since long, all for the sake of redeeming His straying Subjects over here. It is indeed noteworthy, rather praiseworthy that He has not changed His posture even once, by turning right or left and yet, for all this immense hardship undergone by Him, none seems to appreciate it. If the Lord has not got up in sheer disgust and gone back to the Celestium, it is because of His fond hope that, some day, some devotees might turn up and appreciate His great gesture.;

(iv) The Lord appears to be relaxing after all the labours undertaken by Him on behalf of Indra, spanning, on the very day of His emergence as Vāmana, all the worlds, high and low, setting His tender feet on hill and dale. The Āḻvār enquires of the Lord whether He would not permit him to massage His shoulders or the feet, whichever needed relief from pain.

paṇiyā amarar paṇivum, paṇpum, tāmē ām
aṇi ār āḻiyum caṅkamum ēntum avar kāṇmiṉ—
taṉiyā vem nōy ulakil tavirppāṉ, tirunīla
maṇi ār mēṉiyōṭu, eṉ maṉam cūḻa, varuvārē. (VIII–3–6)

Translation

The Supreme Lord, served and adored by the Celestials in Heaven.
Who know no Master other than He, has into this world come down,
Wielding the conch and discus, like unto lovely jewels,
Displaying His Form exquisite of saphire hue, the panacea for all ills;
Bewildered is my mind whether any evil shall on Him befall.

Notes

(i) The Lord's exquisite charm is such as to excite the fear, (needless, of course, in that holy Land of the Celestials in Heaven) in regard to His safety. As elucidated, time and again, such an attitude stems from the inordinate love borne by them for the Lord whose rare charm and effulgence, just like all good things loved and longed for, excite, rightly or wrongly, fears regarding their durability. Such being the case, it is no wonder, the Āḻvār grew apprehensive of the safety of the Lord, who has come down, in all His splendour, to this dark land of dirt and devilry.

(ii) The Celestials, referred to, in the first line of this song, are the 'Nitya Sūris', the ever-free angles in heaven, as distinguished from the 'Muktas', the souls that reached heaven, after emancipation from the bondage of birth and rebirth, that dreadful cyclic operation. Unlike the latter, the former have the unique distinction of never having prostituted and defiled their head and tongue by bowing before the unworthy and singing their praise.

varuvār, celvār vaṉparicārattu irunta eṉ
tiruvāḷ mārvaṟku eṉ tiṟam collār; ceyvatu eṉ—
uru ār cakkaram caṅku cumantu, iṅku ummōṭu
orupāṭu uḻalvāṉ, ōr aṭiyāṉum uḷaṉ eṉṟē? (VIII–3–7)

Translation

Alas! those passing in and out of Vaṉparicāram, where resides
 my Lord
Bearing Tiru (Lakṣmī) on His winsome chest, tell Him not,
Here is a vassal ready to get close to Him and roam behind,
Carrying His discus and conch lovely, keeping one end.

Note

The Āḻvār, seated inside of the hollow of the sacred tamarind tree in Tirunakari, pines for the service of the Lord in nearby Tiruvaṉparicāram. He fancies that the passers-by are all moving to and from Tiruvaṉparicāram, only to tell the Lord over there about him and his ardour to serve Him, looking upon Him as his all (Vāsudevassarvamiti), and bring him back the message from that end. But, unfortunately, none goes near him and he concludes, with a galling sense of disappointment, that none of these persons has functioned in the manner he expected. By offering to keep up one end, the Āḻvār is only filling up a gap, the other end being always kept up by Lakṣmaṇa, ever in the Lord's service.

eṉṟē-eṉṉai uṉ ēr ār kōlat tiruntu aṭikkīḻ
niṉṟē āṭceyya nī koṇṭaruḷa niṉaippatutāṉ?
kuṉṟu ēḻ, pār ēḻ, cūḻ kaṭal, ñālam muḻu ēlum
niṉṟē tāviya nīḷ kaḻal āḻit tirumālē. (VIII–3–8)

Translation

Oh, Tirumāl, wielding the discus, when will You deem me fit
To get a lift unto your extremely lovely feet
And serve You firm and steadfast, for ever?
Merely standing on Your feet tall, you did cover
The worlds seven, islands seven, mountains seven and the
 oceans round about.

Note

Seeing that there is none to plead with the Lord on his behalf, the Āḻvār himself now enquires of the Lord what exactly His intentions are in the matter of taking service from him. The Āḻvār sees in front of him the Lord, full of love, ready to concede his wish and yet, the Āḻvār can brook no further delay. He impresses upon the Lord his rapturous love unto His ornamental feet, so very alluring that He cannot bear being apart from Him, any longer. The Āḻvār longs to render selfless service unto the Lord, with single-minded devotion and with no break, remaining by His side always. The Lord, however, keeps silent and this makes the Āḻvār suspect whether the Lord insists on the necessary attainment in him to warrant such an aspiration. Reference to the Lord measuing all the worlds, setting his feet on all and sundries, is, therefore, significant. Did He not set His feet on one and all, high and low, unsolicited, caring least for their attainments? As a matter of fact, the Āḻvār is bound to serve the Lord, out of gratitude for His condescending to come all the way to Tiruvaṉparicāram. It further behoves him to go the whole hog out to serve the Lord and get Him fully relaxed after His arduous spanning of the worlds, setting His tender feet over hill and dale, full of rubbles and brambles. And yet, the initiative for this should come from the Lord and the Āḻvār is eagerly awaitng the day when He would invite him to do His bidding.

tirumāl! nāṉmukaṉ, ceñcaṭaiyāṉ eṉṟu ivarkaḷ em
perumāṉ taṉmaiyai yār aṟikiṟpār? pēci eṉ?
oru mā mutalvā! ūlip pirāṉ! eṉṉai āḷuṭaik
karu mā mēṉiyaṉ! eṉpaṉ-eṉ kātal kalakkavē. (VIII–3–9)

Translation

Tirumāl, can either Nāṉmukaṉ or the one with matted locks
 red
Comprehend Your tenderness? 'tis indeed no good
Talking about this; with a mind by deep love confounded,
I keep saying, You are the Primate unique, my Lord,

Time and all else are by You controlled
And so on, by Your exquisite Form of bluish tint enthralled.

Note

On the Āḻvār being told by the Lord that there is hardly any room for the fears entertained by him regarding His safety, when the four-headed Brahmā and a host of other Devas were there to attend on Him, the Āḻvār rebuts this position. He points out that they are not the persons to appreciate Him, in terms of His remarkable tenderness and bewitching Form, being mere self-centred boon-seekers. Even he (Āḻvār), soaked in God-love, could only touch a fringe of the Lord's tenderness of Form and keep on uttering a few things over and over again, in the exuberance of love for Him and do nothing more. Neither the self-seeking Devas nor the love-intoxicated Āḻvār is, therefore, up to the mark in the matter of expressing solicitude for the Lord's well-being.

kalakkam illā nal tava muṉivar, karai kaṇṭōr,
tuḷakkam illā vāṉavar ellām toḻuvārkaḷ;
malakkam eyta mā kaṭal-taṉṉaik kaṭaintāṉai
ulakka nām pukaḻkiṟpatu eṉ ceyvatu? uraiyīrē. (VIII–3–10)

Translation

There are the sages great with perfect clarity of mind,
The released Souls and Eternal Heroes of Heaven to attend
And dote on the Lord, who the mighty ocean churned;
Say then, if we frail beings can at all comprehend
His glory great, seeing that unto it there is no end.

Note

It was only when the Lord finally brought home the fact, quite reassuring, that He was carefully attended upon by the most eminent sages like Sanaka, Nandana and others, the 'Muktas', released from the bondage of samsāra and the 'Nityas', the Eternal Heroes in Heaven, and, above all, His own prowess unlimited, the Āḻvār's fears were set at

naught. But then, it might be asked whether this was not already known to the Āḻvār, endowed by the Lord with perfect knowledge. The love-intoxicated Āḻvār just didn't know when and what could be the source of his anxiety about the Lord's well-being and when and how such anxiety would get cleared, as the illustrious Nampiḷḷai would put it.

uraiyā vem nōy tavira, aruḷ nīḷ muṭiyāṉai
varai ār māṭam maṉṉu kurukūre caṭakōpaṉ
urai ēy coltoṭai ōr āyiruttuḷ ip pattum
niraiyē vallār nīṭu ulakattup piṟavārē. (VIII–3–11)

Translation

Those that learn well these songs ten,
Out of the thousand divine songs of Caṭakōpaṉ,
Hailing from Kurukūr with its castles tall,
In adoration of the Lord wearing the crown tall,
Who did his parlous fears about Him quell,
Will never in this sprawling world be reborn.

Note

The benefit accruing from learning well this decad as set out above, is self-explanatory. It is, of course, not mere freedom from rebirth in this wretched land where there is none who would feel concerned about the Lord's safety and well-bei g but also eternal enjoyment in Heaven where the whole lot of them are dedicated to the Lord's well-being. As regards the reference in this song to the tall crown of the Sovereign Lord, here is a juicy interpretation furnished by a preceptor, named, Ammaṅki Ammāl :

"The Lord would appear to have nodded His crowned head, by way of assuring the Āḻvār about fulfilling his desire." The fulfilment of the Āḻvār's desire in this context, would mean exhibiting unto him the band of devotees who would attend on the Lord and do His behest, such as following Him, carrying His bow and arrows etc., thereby curing him of his erstwhile fears regarding the Lord's loneliness, unaided and unattended.

Eighth Centum—Fourth Decad (VIII-4)
(Var kaṭā aruvi)

Preamble

The Lord's presence, in this dark land, alone and unaided, excited the reasonable fear of the Āḻvār that the worldlings would approach Him only to achieve their own selfish ends, with little or no care or love for Him. No doubt, the Lord allayed the Āḻvār's fears, as we saw towards the end of the last decad. Still, the Lord has a lingering doubt that, in the exuberance of the Āḻvār's love for Him, he might once again entertain similar fears about His safety and feel agitated. And so, He wanted to dispel the Āḻvār's fears, with no chance whatever of their revival and revealed unto him His invulnerable abode in Tirucceṅkuṉṟūr Tiruccirrāṟu (in present Kerala State), out of bounds to the ungodly, attended by the mighty band of three thousand Vedic scholars, full of devotion. As a further precaution, the Lord also exhibited unto the Āḻvār, His wondrous deeds revealing His extra-ordinary strength and valour. With his fears thus eradicated *in toto*, the Āḻvār could whole-heartedly enjoy in this decad the Lord's exquisite beauty.

A striking parallel to this can be found in Lord Rāma's exhortation to Sugrīva, the monkey king, by way of dispelling his fears regarding Vibhīṣaṇa's admission into their camp. In the heated debate that was going on, opposition to the grant of asylum to Vibhīṣaṇa was mounting high. Intervening in the debate, the Lord asserted, *inter alia*, that He could, if He liked, destroy the Rākṣasas all the world over (not merely those in Laṅkā) with the mere tip of His thumb. This was enough to root out Sugrīva's fears about the possible ill-effects of granting asylum to Vibhīṣaṇa, come down from Rāvaṇa's Laṅka. The reassured Sugrīva, the erstwhile leader of the opposition in the debate that preceded, exclaimed:

"Oh, Rāma, You have a thorough mastery over the subtleties of Dharma; as the Protector of the entire universe, your creed is to instil happiness in one and all and it is indeed praiseworthy. I am now quite clear in my mind about the bonafides of Vibhīṣaṇa and it is but meet that I myself go up to him, anchored in the mid-air, and bring him here."

While Śrī Rāma quelled the fears of Sugrīva and others in His camp by a mere utterance, as above, Lord Kṛṣṇa set at naught the

grim fears of the on-lookers through actual demonstration of His immense strength, making mincemeat of the monstrous wrestlers, set up by Kamsa, in no time.

vār kaṭā aruvi yāṉai mā malaiyiṉ
  maruppu iṇaik kuvaṭu iṟuttu, uruṭṭi,
ūr koḷ tiṇ pākaṉ uyir cekuttu, araṅkiṉ
  mallaraik koṉṟu, cūḷ paraṇmēl
pōr kaṭā aracar puṟakkiṭa, māṭam
  mīmicaik kañcaṉait takartta
cīr koḷ ciṟṟāyaṉ tirucceṅkuṉṟūril
  tiruccirrāṟu eṅkaḷ celcārvē. (VIII–4–1)

Translation

Tirucceṅkuṉṟūr Tiruccirrāṟu is unto us the fearless haven,
Where resides the victorious cowherd young (Kṛṣṇa) who pulled down
Kañcaṉ from the floor above and slew, having already slain
The wrestlers at the palace gate and the elephant terrific,
Like unto a mountain in must, pulling out its tusks,
The twin peaks and the mahout as well, making the armed kings around run back.

Notes

The valour, exhibited by the Lord unto the Āḻvār, permeates this very song, as seen from its martial tempo. Kuvalayāpīṭa, the huge elephant, in must, stationed right at the entrance to Kamsa's palace, is compared to a mountain with its cascades and the tusks of the elephant, the mountain peaks. The Divine cowherd boy slew the elephant effortlessly and killed the mahout also. The rest is self-explanatory and yet, it is interesting to note down here what Ācārya Ammaṅki Ammāl said about the Lord's decapitation of Kamsa.

"The Lord makes, at His pleasure, a king of a man and invests him with a crown and other insignia of royalty; but when it pleases Him to unmake the King, he is deprived, first, o

all his royal emblems, and, thus stripped, the erstwhile King becomes a mere pigmy of a man and he is then punished as he might deserve. "

It was a frustrated and terribly frightened Kamsa, who had taken shelter in the first floor of his palace, who was pounced upon by young Kṛṣṇa who shot up to where the felon of an uncle was hiding. The Divine lad pulled Kamsa down, by the locks and broke him up like an earthen pot, still wet.

eṅkaḷ celcārvu, yāmuṭai amutam,
imaiyavar appaṉ, eṉ appaṉ,
poṅku mūvulakum paṭaittu, aḻittu, aḻikkum
poruntu mūvuruvaṉ, em aruvaṉ,
ceṅkayal ukaḷum tēm paṇai puṭai cūḻ
tiruceṅkuṉṟūrt tiruccirṟāṟu
aṅku amarkiṉṟa ātiyāṉ allāl-
yāvar maṟṟu eṉ amar tuṇaiyē? (VIII-4-2)

Translation

Saviour have I none but the Primate, my very life,
Residing in fertile Tirucceṅkuṉṟūr Tiruccirṟāṟu, our haven safe,
The overlord of the Celestials, our Nectar, who takes on,
For the creation of the sprawling worlds, their sustentation
And dissolution, the triple forms appropriate.

Note

In the preceding song, the Lord displayed His valour and now He reveals His nectarean sweetness. When the Āḻvār refers to Him, as ' our Nectar ', instead of " My Nectar ', it only bespeaks his universal love and catholicity, his deep concern for us all, who have the great, good fortune to be connected with him, the Progenitor of the clan of ' Prapannas ', vide also II-7. The Lord discharges the functions of creation and dissolution, standing within Brahmā and Rudra, as their Internal Controller, while He Himself looks after the function of ' Protection ' of the whole Universe. Such a one stays permanently in Tiruccirṟāru in His Iconic Form, (Unlike His Incarnate Forms as Rāma and Kṛṣṇa, of limited

duration, in by-gone days), the safe haven of the Āḻvār and all those associated with him.

eṉ amar perumāṉ, imaiyavar perumāṉ,
iru nilam iṭanta em perumāṉ,
muṉṉai val viṉaikaḷ muḻutu uṭaṉ māḷa,
eṉṉai āḷkiṉṟa em perumāṉ,
teṉ ticaikku aṇi koḷ
tirucceṅkuṉṟūril tiruccirṟārṟaṅkarai mipāl
niṉṟa em perumāṉ aṭi allāl-caraṇ
niṉaippilum piṟitu illai eṉakkē. (VIII-4-3)

Translation

The Lord is the Master of the Celestials and me alike;
From beneath the waters deep, the wide Earth He pulled along;
His is the glory of destroying, in a trice, my dire sins age-long
And making me His vassal; embedded in my thoughts, as my sole refuge,
Are the feet of my Lord, Who does on the west bank reside
Of Tirucchenkuṉṟūr Tiruccirṟāṟu, the beaming jewel of the south.

Note

The Lord is the Master of the exalted Celestials and that proclaims His Supremacy; but then, He is also the Master of the Āḻvār, the lowliest of the lowly and this brings out His amazing simplicity. The Lord could enlist the Āḻvār as His vassal, by revealing unto him His great prowess as the Sustainer and Redeemer of the universe, during and after the deluge, respectively; the Āḻvār, therefore, seeks refuge at His feet and his mind cannot turn towards any one else.

piṟitu illai eṉakku-periya mūvulakum
niṟaiyap pēr uruvamāy nimi nta
kuṟiya māṇ emmāṉ, kurai kaṭal kaṭainta
kōla māṇikkam, eṉ ammāṉ,
ceṟi kulai vāḻai, kamuku, teṅku aṇi cūḻ
tirucceṅkuṉṟūrt ti uccirṟāṟu
aṟiya meymmaiyē niṉṟa em perumāṉ
aṭiiṇai allatu-ōr araṇē. (VIII-4-4)

Translation

Refuge have I none but the pair of feet of my Lord,
Who stays in Tirucciṟṟāṟu with orchards, fine and fertile,
In all His true splendour, the Benefactor great, Who did unto me reveal
His emerald Form lovely, Vāmana, my Sire, Who grew big and spread
All the worlds over, who the bellowing ocean once churned.

Notes

(i) If, as a tender Babe, the Lord could hold in His stomach all the worlds, where was the need for Him to grow big and span all the worlds in three strides, instead of doing it in His diminutive Form as Vāmana, with which He had demanded the gift of land from Bali? The great Nampiḷḷai has a ready answer, admirable as usual. The expansion of the Lord's Form into Tṛvikrama, was due to the exuberance of His joy in having accomplished the mission for which He incarnated.

(ii) Whenever the episode of the churning of the ocean is alluded to, the Āḷvār invariably feels why the Lord, of remarkable tenderness, should have under taken all the trouble, when there were large numbers of Devas and Asuras, rugged enough, for the job. Actually, those guys, with all their complement, were not equal to the task and the Lord had to assume two different forms and join both the groups, so as to put His own shoulders to the wheel and deliver the goods.

(iii) The Lord of such great prowess has manifested Himself in all His pristine splendour in the Iconic Form in which He stays at Tirucceṅkuṉṟūr Tirucciṟṟāṟu, so that every one could recognise Him as the Supreme Lord.

allatu ōr araṇum avaṉil vēṟu illai;
atu poruḷ ākilum, avaṉai
allatu eṉ āvi amarntu aṇaikillātu;
ātalāl, avaṉ uṟaikiṉṟa

nalla nāṉmaṟaiyōr vēḷviyuḷ maṭutta
naṟum pukai vicumpu oḷi maṟaikkum
nalla nīḷ māṭat tirucceṅkuṉṟūril
tirucciṟṟāṟu eṉakku nal araṇē. (VIII-4-5)

Translation

True 'tis, the Lord enshrined in temples elsewhere isn't different
From the One in Tirucceṅkuṉṟūr Tirucciṟṟāṟu enshrined and yet
My mind abides not, in any other; 'tis indeed my haven safe,
Where there are castles, tall and elegant and the fumes fragrant
Shoot from the ritual fire and darken the firmament.

Notes

(i) While conceding the fact that the Lord, enshrined in Tirucciṟṟāṟu, also graces many other pilgrim centres, the Āḷvār says that his mind stands rivetted to this particular centre. This is like Hanumān having abjured even the Heaven and preferred to stay in this abode itself, saying, " Bhāvo nānyatra gacchati ".

(ii) The rituals performed by the Brahmins of this sacred place were not for securing any selfish ends and thus 'niṣkāmya', done, not with an eye on results, but as an end in itself. Even if there was a motive behind, it could be only by way of warding off the evil forces, the ungodly, so that no harm shall befall the Deity. This is, by-no-means, objectionable, as Nampiḷḷai would say. Even the great Rāmānuja had recourse to special rituals, using spells and incantations invoking Lord Veṅkaṭeśvara of Holy Tirupati, for cutting out the seemingly interminable life of that felon, the cruel Cola king, kṛmikaṇṭa (worm-necked) whose religious persecution had forced that Saint to stay away from Sriraṅgam for eleven long years. After a lapse of two or three days, a stinking smell, like that of singed hair, emanated from the sacrificial fire, whereupon Saint Rāmānuja stopped the ceremony, guessing that the heretical Cōḷa must be dead. The same day, a door-keeper of Cōḷa poked the king in the neck with a staff,

causing a loathsome stinking sore, full of vermin and the King gave up his ghost.

eṉakku nal araṇai, eṉatu ār uyirai,
imaiyavar tanta tāy-taṉṉai,
taṉakkum taṉ taṉmai aṟivu-ariyāṉai,
taṭam kaṭal-paḷḷi ammāṉai,
maṉakkoḷ cī- mūvāyiravar-vaṉ civaṉum,
ayaṉum tāṉum oppār-vāḷ
kaṉakkoḷ tiṇ māṭat tiruccenkuṉṟūril
tiruccirṟāṟu ataṉuḷ kaṇṭēṉē. (VIII-4-6)

Translation

My haven safe, my sole Sustainer, the All-in-one unto Celestials,
He, who can't gauge His own disposition (unfathomable),
He, who does on the ocean vast repose, I could envision
In Tiruccenkuṉṟūr Tiruccirṟāṟu, abounding in solid mansions
And Brahmins numbering three thousand, potent like the mighty Civaṉ
And Ayaṉ, in whose whose hearts the Lord stands enshrined.

Notes

(i) It may be recalled that, as already mentioned in the preamble to this decad, the Lord pacified the Āḷvār and disarmed him of his fears, by pointing out to him this very setting. The Lord is safe and sound in this pilgrim centre, surrounded by three thousand brahmins who are as potent as Brahmā and Śivā and could as well discharge the functions assigned by the Lord to those exalted functionaries. c.f. Śloka 20 of Āḷavantār's Stotra Ratna-" tvadāśritānaam jagadudbhavasthiti, praṇāsa samsāra vimocanadayaḥ bhavanti leela, " which means:

" The creation, preservation and dissolution of the universe, release from family bondage etc., constitute the sporting activities of Your devotees themselves ".

(ii) These Brahmins, immersed in devout contemplation of the Lord's numerous auspicious traits, are ever alert to the impending danger, studiously safeguarding the

Deity of their hearts. They are on a par with Sage Bharadvāja, who was apprehensive of the safety of Śri Rāma and party in exile, during the interval between their first meeting with him and their subsequent return after vanquishing Rāvaṇa.

tiruccenkuṉṟūril tiruccirṟāṟu-ataṉuḷ
kaṇṭa at tiruvaṭi eṉṟum-
tiruc ceyya kamalak kaṇṇum, cevvāyum,
cevvaṭiyum, ceyya kaiyum,
tiruc ceyya kamala untiyum, ceyya
kamalai mārpum, ceyya uṭaiyum,
tiruc ceyya muṭiyum, āramum, paṭaiyum
tikaḻa-eṉ cintaiyuḷāṉē. (VIII-4-7)

Translation

Lodged in my heart for ever is the Lord, I envision
In Tiruccirṟāṟu with red lotus-eyes, coral lips and feet red,
Red palms, the navel lovely, bearing the lotus red,
The chest red, bearing (Lakṣmi) the lotus-born,
Silken robes red, the crown red, the lovely jewels and gleaming weapons.

Note

The Āḷvār goes into the details of the Lord's exquisite charm — the eyes, broad and bewitching, like the red lotus in fresh bloom, the stabilising smile, that is, the Lord's smile from His coral lips which stabilises the attraction held out by His gracious looks unto the votaries, the lovely feet at which the votaries, enthralled by the Lord's scintillating smiles, seek refuge, the hands that gather up and embrace those seeking refuge at His feet, the navel, the seat of all creation, the centre of eternal attraction and enjoyment, the winsome chest bearing the Divine Mother, the great intercessor, who could wean away even the ungodly and make them God-bent, the matching robes, the fear-dispelling crown proclaiming the Lord's sovereignty and the beneficent weapons. With this intense enjoyment of the

Lord's regal Form, inch by inch, could there at all be any room for any kind of fear in the Āḻvār's mind?

tikaḻa eṉ cintaiyuḷ iruntāṉai,
celu nilattēvar nāṉmaṟaiyōr
ticai kaikūppi, ēttum tiruccenkuṉṟuril
tiruccirrārraṅ karaiyāṉai,
pukar koḷ vāṉavarkaḷ pukaliṭam-taṉṉai,
acurar vaṉ kaiyar vem kūṟṟai,
pukaḻumāṟu ariyēṉ-poruntu mūvulakum
paṭaippoṭu keṭuppuk kāppavaṉē. (VIII–4–8)

Translation

The Lord sparkling in my heart, Who in holy Tiruccirrāṟu resides,
Adored by the vedic scholars, brahmins bright, from all sides,
The shelter safe unto exalted Devas but deadly unto Asura hordes,
The great Sire, who creates, sustains and dissolves the three worlds,
Him I hardly know how unto my heart's fill I can laud.

Notes

(i) The exaltation of the Devas results from their ability to grant the boons, sought by their respective votaries. Even these luminaries seek refuge in the Supreme Lord in times of dire need and danger. Did not the Lord save Prajāpati (Brahmā) from a calamity like the spoliation of the vedas and Paśupati (Śiva) from the sin of patricide and molestation by demons, besides conferring on them several other benefits? At the same time, the Lord is worse than deadly to the ungodly Asuras, who give endless trouble to Devas.

(ii) The Āḻvār cannot resist the urge to praise the Lord of such great glory but, at the same time, he does not know how to laud Him, the precise manner in which he could

sing the Lord's praise. At best, he can only say, in general terms, that the Lord controls the triple functions of creation, sustentation and dissolution of the three worlds and so on.

paṭaippoṭu keṭuppuk kāppavaṉ, pirama
paramparaṉ, civappirāṉ avaṉē;
iṭaippukku ōr uruvum oḻivu illai avaṉē;
pukaḻvu illai; yāvaiyum tāṉē-
koṭaip perum pukaḻār iṉaiyar taṉ āṉār
kūriya viccaiyōṭu oḻukkam
naṭaip pali iyaṟkai tiruccenkuṉṟūril
tiruccirrāṟu amarnta nātaṉē. (VIII–4–9)

Translation

The Lord, Who lovingly stays in Tiruccirrāṟu where do reside
The Brahmins, known alike for their piety and generosity, richly endowed
With knowledge sharp and power immense and in worship well engaged,
Is the One, Who, creation, sustentation and dissolution, controls,
Who, Brahmā and Śiva, directs, as their Internal Controller
And staying in between them protects the Universe, pervades every one
And things, one and all; 'tis indeed no exaggeration.

Notes

(i) The Āḻvār avers that the Lord, enshrined in holy Tiruccen-kuṉṟūr Tiruccirrāṟu is the One, who controls all creatures from Brahmā down to the tiny insect and directs them through the different stages of creation, sustenance and dissolution, like unto the Soul directing and supporting the body.

(ii) This song also highlights the manifold glory of the Brahmins residing in this holy centre, whose attainments place them on a par with the Lord Himself. The Āḻvār,

finds it really heartening that there are a good many of them, attending on the Lord unremittingly, with great devotion.

amarnta nātaṉai, avar avar āki,
    avarkku aruḷ aruḷum ammāṉai,
amarnta taṉ paḻaṉat tiruccceṅkuṉṟūril
    tiruccirrāṟṟaṅ karaiyāṉai,
amarnta cīr mūvāyiravar vētiyarkaḷ
    tampati avaṉitēvar vāḻvu
amarnta māyōṉai, mukkaṇ ammāṉai,
    nāṉmukaṉai-amarntēṉē. (VIII–4–10)

The worthy Master, the Lover great of His votaries all,
The great Granter of boons by them sought, one and all,
Who resides in fertile Tirucciṟṟāṟu, the home and hearth
Of the three thousand brahmins and Vaiṣṇavas, the Devas on
    Earth,
The wondrous Lord I have attained, who dwells within
The triple-eyed Sire (Śiva) and (Brahmā) Nāṉmukaṉ.

Note

The Supreme Lord, Mahā Viṣṇu alone deserves the appellation, 'Master'. His supremacy notwithstanding, He has made Himself visible and easily accessible to one and all, staying in the holy Tirucceṅkuṉṟūr Tirucciṟṟāṟu. The Āḻvār says, he has attained the Great Master, right here. The Lord is the one and only Giver, a liberal Donor, who exults in lavishing His bounty on all those who seek favours from Him.

tēṉai, naṉ pālai, kaṉṉalai, amutai,
    tiruntu ulaku uṇṭa ammāṉai,
vāṉa nāṉmukaṉai malarnta taṉ koppūḻ
    malarmicaip paṭaitta māyōṉai,
kōṉai, vaṇ kurukūr vaṇ caṭakōpaṉ
    coṉṉa āyirattuḷ ip pattum
vāṉiṉ mītu ēṟṟi aruḷceytu, muṭikkum
    piṟavi mā māyak kūttiṉaiyē. (VIII–4–11

Translation

These ten songs out of the thousand of Kurukūr Caṭakōpaṉ,
Adoring the Lord, highly delicious, like honey, milk and cane-
    juice,
Who in His stomach did all the worlds sustain,
The wondrous Lord, who did on the cool lotus, from His navel,
    produce
The exalted Brahmā, will their chanters lift unto Heaven
And engage them in the eternal service of the Lord,
The mysterious cycle of birth and rebirth, no more to dread.

Notes

(i) Release from family bondage, that is, end of the great saga of worldly life and attainment of the final bliss of eternal service unto the Lord in Heaven are the benefits of chanting this decad. Attainment of the heavenly bliss automatically results in the severance of worldly ties, like unto the prince, languishing in prison, being crowned as soon as the king dies, (so as to avoid the land going without a monarch even for a while), followed by the removal of his fetters.

(ii) The Āḻvār grew apprehensive of the Lord's safety because of His extra-ordinary sweetness, like unto honey, milk and cane-juice and this fear got dispelled by the recollection of the Lord's unique prowess in sustaining all the worlds, during the deluge.

Eighth Centum–Fifth Decad (VIII-5)
(Māyak kūttā)

Preamble

In the third decad of this centum, the Āḻvār grew apprehensive of the safety of the Lord of exquisite charm, moving along in this wicked land alone and unattended. The Āḻvār could, however, regain his composure, shaking off the fear in question, on the assurance given by the Lord, vide VIII-3-10. The following decad revealed an Āḻvār, fully relieved of his erstwhile fears, but the intense mental enjoyment of the Lord's regal Form, enchanting

every inch, resorted to by the Āḻvār in VIII-4-7, once again resulted in a deep yearning, an insatiable longing for external perception of the Lord's Form, as envisioned by him and getting locked in His sweet embrace. Non-fulfilment of his longing has consigned the Āḻvār to the bottom-most depths of dejection, the like of which has not been witnessed in the earlier decade. He cries out, like unto one bodily trapped in a forest fire and his limbs appear to be even more worn out than their owner. The Saint beckons the Lord to appear before him in all His regal splendour, wearing His crown, tall and majestic and moving along, like the exhilarating rain-cloud, the rising Sun, so on and so forth. The Lord did not, however, respond and so, this decad ends on a despondent note, the Āḻvār being led to believe that he would just pass away, immured in grief.

māyak kūttā! vāmaṉā! viṉaiyēṉ kaṇṇā! kaṇ, kai, kāl
tūya ceyya malarkaḷā, cōtic cevvāy mukiḻatā,
cāyal cāmat tirumēṉi taṉ pācaṭaiyā, tāmarai nīḷ
vācat taṭampōl varuvāṉē! oruṇāḷ kāṇa vārāyē. (VIII–5–1)

Translation

Wondrous Lord, Oh, Vāmaṉā, oh, Kaṇṇā beyond this sinner's reach!
With eyes, hands and feet like red lotus in fresh bloom,
Lips, red and radiant, cool, green, leaf-like complexion, You seem,
As You walk along, a huge lotus pond in motion, full of fragrance!
May it please You to appear before me, for a day at least.

Notes

(i) The Āḻvār's request to the Lord is that He should appear before him like a lotus pond, the mere sight of which quenches one's deep thirst. The Lord's eyes, hands and feet look like red lotus flowers in bloom. His coral lips with bewitching smiles resemble the lovely lily and His emerald form looks like the green pond with lotus leaves. This completes the picture of the lotus pond, envisaged by the Āḻvār. c.f. ' Karacaraṇa Saroje......... *Harṣarasi* '—(Mukunda Mālā)

(ii) What precisely egged the Āḻvār on to such a longing has also been indicated in this song. As he was comtemplating the Lord's incarnation as the bewitching Vāmaṇa, at Indra's behest, the Āḻvār longed that He should also present such an exquisite Form to him. If the Lord's incarnation as Vāmaṇa was for the sake of Indra, His incarnation as Kṛṣṇa was only to torment the Āḻvār, by going back to the Celestium, just six weeks before his coming into this abode, like unto a dainty dish hitting against the teeth and falling to the ground without getting inside the mouth to be chewed with great relish. That is why the Āḻvār calls Kṛṣṇa, as the one beyond his (sinner's) reach.

kāṇa vārāy eṉṟu eṉṟu, kaṇṇum vāyum tuvarntu, aṭiyēṉ
nāṉi, nal nāttu alamantāl, iraṅki, oruṇāḷ nī, antō!
kāṇa vārāy!—karu nāyiṟu utikkum karu mā māṇikka
nāḷ nal malaipol cuṭarc cōti muṭi cēr ceṉṉi ammāṉē!
(VIII–5–2)

Translation

Many a time did I call you out, with dried up eyes
And lips parched up, that You do before me appear
Like unto a dark, rising Sun, shedding the lustre rare,
Like the saphire grand, sporting Your radiant crown, neatly poised
On locks beaming like a lovely mountain, just sprung up;
Alas! for me to behold but once, You don't turn up,
Stricken with shame, fatigued do I on this good Earth languish.

Notes

(i) The eyes have become dry and worn out, looking for the Lord in all directions, hoping that He might come from any direction; the lips have become parched up, by calling Him out frequently. The Āḻvār's stinging shame is due to the Lord not turning up, even though he had not called him for trivial personal gains but merely for the pleasure of beholding Him. This might make the worldlings look at him askance, in a derisive spirit, that it is such an unresponsive Lord, he is madly

after. The expression 'Good Earth' could either be in the ironical sense, indicating its notriety indirectly, or might mean, as Piḷḷān would put it, that the Earth is really a good place for all but the Āḻvār, inasmuch as all others presumably enjoy the Lord, quietly as could be inferred from their not calling Him out, as the Āḻvār does. It seems the Āḻvār is the solitary soul, left without such enjoyment and, therefore, crying out, as he has been doing.

(ii) The Sun, rising over the emerald mount, appears to be dark and the Lord's person is like an emerald mountain and hence, the imagery.

muṭicēr ceṉṉi ammā! niṉ moy pūm tāmat taṉ tuḻāyk
kaṭicēr kaṇṇip perumāṉē! eṉṟu eṉṟu ēṅki aḻutakkāl,
paṭicēr makarak kuḻaikaḷum, pavaḷa vāyum, nāl tōḷum,
tuṭi cēr iṭaiyum amaintatu ōr tū nīr mukil pōl tōṉṟāyē.
(VIII–5–3)

Translation

Time and again, did I in deep anguish call You out,
Oh, Sire, donning on Your lovely locks the majestic crown,
Oh, Lord, wearing the tulaci garland, pretty and fragrant;
But You wouldn't before me appear and exhibit Your pearl pendants,
Which Your Form exquisite befit, coral lips, shoulders four,
Thin waist and Your complexion like rain-cloud bearing water clear.

Note

The Āḻvār has been crying himself hoarse, pining for the external perception of the Lord's enchanting Form and enjoying it in all it details. When, due to constant clamouring, his voice gets choked, it should indeed compel the Lord to come down at once and see what has gone wrong with the yearning devotee. And yet, He has not turned up, making the Āḻvār suspect whether He is beyond his ear-shot.

tū nīr mukil pōl tōṉṟum niṉ cuṭar koḷ vaṭivum, kaṉivāyum,
tē nīrk kamalak kaṇkaḷum vantu, eṉ cintai niṟaintavā-
mā nīr veḷḷi malaitaṉmēl vaṉ kār nīla mukil pōla,
tū nīrk kaṭaluḷ tuyilvāṉē! entāy!—collamāṭṭēṉē. (VIII–5–4)

Translation

My Sire, reposing in the Milk-ocean on serpent-bed,
Like unto the dark rain-cloud on the crest of silvery mount,
Embedded in deep waters! describe I can't
How my thoughts are filled with Your Form radiant,
Like the rain-cloud bearing water clear, lips red
And eyes lovely, akin to lotus which sweet water holds.

Notes

(i) This song and the next, striking a jubilant note, the exact opposite of what is revealed by the other songs in this decad, are indeed ironically couched. The Āḻvār really feels vexed that the Lord's sweet and enchanting Form torments his thoughts, in the absence of the external enjoyment, longed for, by him.

(ii) Here is indeed a grand poetic imagery. The cloud-hued Lord resting on Ādi-Śeṣa, the white serpent, in the Milk-ocean, is likened to the transparent water-laden cloud on the crest of a white mountain embedded in the deep oceanic waters. Not only this enchanting Form but the lovely eyes and the fruit-like lips appear before the Āḻvār and each one of these tempts the Āḻvār to enjoy them separately and thus torments him.

colla māṭṭēṉ aṭiyēṉ-uṉ tuḷaṅku cōtit tiruppātam
ellai il cīr iḷa ñāyiṟu iraṇṭupōl eṉ uḷḷavā;
allal eṉṉum iruḷ cērtaṟku upāyam eṉṉē-āḻi cūḷ
mallai ñālam muḻutu uṇṭa mā nīrk koṇṭal vaṇṇaṉē?
(VIII–5–5)

Translation

Oh, Lord, You are like unto a water-laden cloud,
The worlds, by oceans surrounded, You did in Your stomach hold,

The radiance within me, shed by Your dazzling feet superfine,
Like unto a pair of rising Suns, I just can't define,
Say then, how I can the affliction dark, of forgetfulness. attain.

Notes

Āḷvār to the Lord:

"My Lord, Your enchanting Form is tormenting my mind without respite; I can survive only if I forget all about this. I can, however, never forget this and I, therefore, pray unto You, my great benefactor, to suggest ways and means of forgetting You altogether".

Lord: "Āḷvār, You haven't gained my physical presence as yet. It should, therefore, be possible for you to forget me easily".

Āḷvār: "Oh, Sire, have I not told You already (in I-10-10) that I can never more forget You, firmly lodged in my heart? Having cut out my nescience, *in toto*, through Your redemptive grace, Your dazzling feet are in my mind firmly implanted. It is up to You now to solve this riddle and find out some means by which I can forget You and be spared all this misery".

So then, here is a peculiar problem for the frustrated Āḷvār who can't have the external enjoyment, intensely longed for by him and is yet continually tormented by the radiance of the Lord's dazzling feet, shining in his head. The Āḷvār prays unto the Lord to put out this light and induce darkness that can make him forget Him altogether. In Nampiḷḷai's Īṭu commentary, two interpretations have been set out: According to Parāśara Bhaṭṭar, the Āḷvār prays unto the Lord: "If You are intent upon tormenting me by withholding from me Your physical presence, better induce in me the dark nescience, rather suggest how I can acquire it".

Āācarya Ammaṅki Ammāl would say: "With Your dazzling feet illumining my mind all the time, there is no room whatever for nescience, the distressing darkness; if such darkness could, however, be induced in me, I can safely

align myself with the worldlings and run after food and raiment like them, forgetting You altogether."

koṇṭal vaṇṇā! kuṭakkūttā! viṉaiyēṉ kaṇṇā! kaṇṇā! eṉ
aṇṭa vāṇā! eṉṟu, eṉṉai āḷak kūppiṭṭu aḻaittakkāl,
viṇ-taṉmēl-tāṉ, maṇmēl-taṉ, viri nīrk kaṭal-tāṉ, maṟṟuttāṉ,
toṇṭaṉēṉ uṉ kaḻalkāṇa, oruṇāḷ vantu, tōṉṟāyē. (VIII–5–6)

Translation

Oh, cloud-hued Lord, Oh, Pot-dancer, when this sinner calls You out,
Oh, Kaṇṇā, Oh, Kaṇṇā, Oh, heavenly Lord, so that You may enlist
Me, in your service, even for a day You appear not
Before this vassal either from Heaven, Earth or oceanic waters vast
Or from wherever You might be, omnipresent that You are,
For me to behold your lovely feet.

Note

Where there is a will, there is a way. The Āḷvār feels poignantly why the Lord, who could, if He so wills, come from anywhere, does not present Himself before him. He could manifest Himself right from the space above, come down from Heaven in all that transcendent splendour, from the Earth where He had already incarnated as Rāma and Kṛṣṇa or from the vast ocean, the Vyūha, the seat of all His creative activities, or from any of the Pilgrim centres, in His Iconic manifestation or from anywhere else, being all-pervasive, in every post and pillar. The Lord's feet constitute the Āḷvār's source of subsistence and it is only to behold them and render service at those very feet that the Āḷvār is inviting the Lord to appear before him, at least one day.

vantu tōṉṟāy; aṉṟēl, uṉ vaiyam tāya malar aṭikkīḻ
munti vantu yāṉ niṟpa, mukappē kūvip paṇikoḷḷāy—
centaṇ kamalak kaṇ, kai, kāl, civanta vāy ōr karu nāyiṟu
antam illāk katir parappi, alarntatu okkum ammāṉē!
(VIII–5–7)

Translation

Oh, radiant Lord, like unto the endless rays of a black Sun,
With eyes like lotus, cool and red, hands, feet and lips, all red,
Even if You appear not before me, pray, lift me on
To Your lotus feet, which did span all the worlds
And from this vassal service do command.

Note

The Āḻvār is granting the Lord the option either to come down here so that he may behold Him or if, in the light of His grandeur and the pettiness of the supplicant, He doesn't deign to come, He would do well to take him over to that end (Heaven). There, the Āḻvār would not only behold the Lord and have his heart's fill but he would also want the Lord to take service from him, so that he could render unstinting service at the Lord's feet which spanned the worlds and, in the process, stepped on the heads of one and all, without distinction of high and low, Vaśiṣṭa or caṇḍāla. The Lord's enchanting beauty has made the Āḻvār pine for Him and like the fish out of water, he can't bear being apart from Him any longer and hence, this kind of insistence on his part.

okkum ammāṉ uruvam eṉṟu, uḷḷam kuḻaintu nāḷ nāḷum
tokka mēkap pal kuḻaṅkaḷ kāṇumtōṟum, tolaivaṉ nāṉ;
takka aivar-tamakkāy aṉṟu īr aimpatiṉmar tāḷ cāyap
pukka naltērt taṉippākā! vārāy-ituvō poruttamē? (VIII-5-8)

Translation

Every time I see the gathering clouds, I am by Your memory stung,
My Lord, Your fame as the devotee's henchman is far flung,
As [Arujuna's] charioteer unique, You led to victory the worthy five,
Their hundred cousins crumbling down yet down you don't dive
And regale me [in that very Form],
Is this how You do unto Your fame conform?

Note

Here is the Āḻvār who sees in the rain-clouds, gathered up above, the Lord's likeness and is haunted by His memory, unlike the worldlings who would think of such clouds only in terms of the rainfall and the bumper crop. Even the Pāṇḍavas, on whose behalf the Lord underwent immense hardships and did even the menial service of driving Arjuna's chariot, were not of the grand calibre of the Āḻvār. And yet, the Lord known for His readiness to serve His devotees, does not deign to appear before the Āḻvār and satisfy his craving to behold Him and feast his eyes on His insatiable beauty. The Āḻvār's poser, as in this song, would seem to raise grave doubts about the veracity of the great epic of Mahā Bhārata, the wondrous deeds performed by the Lorp and His breath-taking activities on behalf of His devotees, establishing His fame as a partisan of His devotees. Could it be mere propaganda, carried on, through His hirelings, the sages?

ituvō poruttam? miṉ āḻip paṭaiyāy! ēṟum irum ciṟaippuḷ—
atuvē koṭiyā uyarttāṉē! eṉṟu eṉṟu ēṅki aḻutakkāl,
etuvēyākak karutuṅkol-im mā ñālam poṟai tīrppāṉ!
matu vār cōlai uttara maturaip piṟanta māyaṉē? (VIII-5-9)

Translation

Oh, wielder of the effulgent discus, that mighty weapon!
On Your banner is that bird, Your carrier with large plumes,
How indeed your callousness can unto Your fame conform,
Often do I ask myself and keep sobbing; what is at all the intention,
I can hardly guess, of the wondrous Lord, Who was born
In Uttaramaturai (Mathurā), abounding in orchards fine.

Notes

The Āḻvār is now revolving within his mind, what the Lord of wondrous deeds and auspicious traits, who, during His incarnation as Kṛṣṇa, took birth at Mathurā (in Uttara Pradeś) might be intending to do with him. Let alone what He did for the Pāṇḍvas, as against the Kauravas, how indeed

does He mingle with Garuḍa, who (as Āḷavantār puts it, in Śloka 41 of his Stotra Ratna) is said to fulfil several roles, as servant, friend, vehicle (carrier), seat, banner, canopy and fan! Does the Lord really take all this service from Garuḍa or does He keep him also at a distance, as is the case with the Āḻvār? If the Lord so wills, He could come down to the Āḻvār, mounted on Garuḍa. Perhaps, even Garuḍa is not pressed into service, by the Lord, these days!

And then, the discus could have jolly well been commissioned by the Lord, to cut out all those impediments, which operate as a bar to the Āḻvār's union with Him and yet, if He has not done so, that only means, His relationship with the discus is no better than that which subsists between Him and the Āḻvār.

The Āḻvār is now left a-guessing what precisely the Lord's intentions might be, with regard to him.

piṟanta māyā! pāratam poruta māyā! ni iṉṉē
ciṟanta kāl, tī, nīr, vāṉ, maṇ, piṟavum āya perumāṉē!
kaṟanta pāluḷ neyyē pōl ivaṟṟuḷ eṅkum kaṇṭukoḷ—
iṟantu niṉṟa peru māyā! uṉṉai eṅkē kāṇkēṉē? (VIII–5–10)

Translation

Wondrous indeed are Your incarnations, oh, Lord,
Many a wonder You did, during the battle of Bhārata, perform,
The famous elements five and all things from them derived
Are unto You, the bodies many; like ghee, latent in milk fresh drawn,
You do in all things mysteriously abide; where can I find you indeed?

Notes

(i) No doubt, the Lord exhibited His amazing simplicity during the Incarnations, betokening His loving condescension. But the Āḻvār, born at a later time, missed them all. Again, the Lord is said to abide in all beings and things and yet, He cannot be see

with the naked eye. Where then could the Lord be seen is the question put by the Āḻvār in this song. He is really worried whether he would just pass away without realising his desire to come face to face with the Lord.

(ii) The Lord's incarnation itself is a matter of great wonder. the birthless Being born, of course, at His sweet will and then His mingling with the rest, with no reservation. The wonders performed by Him, during His incarnation as Kṛṣṇa, were many indeed and, in particular, those bearing on the course and conduct of the great battle of Mahā Bhārata were: Taking up arms, at one stage, contrary to His earlier pledge not to wield any weapon, conversion of day into night, spotting out the vital centres of life, the vulnerable spot in the enemy attacking which would prove fatal, so on and so forth.

(iii) How could it be asserted that the Invisible Lord resides in all creatures and things? The Upaniṣad provides the answer: "ghrutamiva payasi nigūḍaṁ". The milk is churned into butter, which again is melted into ghee. But none can, on the face of it, perceive the presence of ghee in milk. And so does the Lord abide unseen in all that exists.

eṅkē kāṇkēṉ, īṉ tuḻāy ammāṉ-taṉṉai yāṉ? eṉṟu eṉṟu,
aṅkē tāḻnta coṟkaḷāl, am taṇ kurukūrc caṭakōpaṉ
ceṅkēḻ coṉṉa āyirattuḷ ivaiyum pattum vallārkaḷ,
iṅkē kāṇa, iṉ piṟappē makiḻvar-elliyum kālaiyē. (VIII–5–11)

Translation

Those that are conversant with these songs ten,
Out of the thousand elegant songs of Kurukūr Caṭakōpaṉ,
Who did pine for the Lord, wearing tulaci garland superfine,
And with melting tenderness cry out where indeed he could behold Him,
Will, right here and now, enjoy with no intermission bliss supreme.

Note

The end-song avers that those that learn this decad will be steeped in God-enjoyment, day and night, right in this world and, in this very birth, without undergoing the hardships and the vicissitudes which the Āḻvār had to pass through. The Lord will, on His part, make amends for His remissness in not responding to the Āḻvār's invitation, as in the opening song of this decad, to come and take service from him, by duly requiting the chanters of this decad. Unto these persons, He will rush up and shower on them divine bliss without intermission.

Eighth Centum—Sixth Decad (VIII-6)
(Elliyum kālaiyum)

Preamble

The Āḻvār's yearning, in the last decad, was indeed too deep for words. At the same time, it has to be stressed that, if the Jñāni loves God dearly, He loves the Jñāni even more. And so, the Lord's love for the Āḻvār also defies description. Stung by a deep sense of remorse over His laxity in not responding to the Āḻvār's invitation, the Lord pondered over the step to be taken by Him to placate the Āḻvār. But then, if He straightaway presented Himself before the Āḻvār, in his present state of mind, he would just collapse, due to excessive joy. It was, therefore, expedient that the Āḻvār's enjoyment of the Lord should be induced by stages, so as to be stable, without anything untoward happening. This was precisely the reason why Śri Rāma despatched Hanumān first to meet Bharata and convey to him the news of His return from exile soon. It was only a day later, after availing of Sage Bharadwāja's hospitality en route, that Rama met Bharata who was meanwhile getting ready to receive the elder, back home from His long exile. Lord Kṛṣṇa likewise adopted the 'go-slow' tactics by making a night-halt outside Hastināpur and going to the citadel, only the next day. Meanwhile, news had reached the ardent devotees like Vidhura, of the impending visit of the Lord on His famous errand to Dhrutarāṣṭra's court. But for this phased programme, excessive joy due to the sudden arrival of Lord Kṛṣṇa

would have upset those devotees and thrown them into a state of mental imbalance. In this particular case, the Lord who wished the Āḻvār to come and mingle with Him freely, stationed Himself at the pilgrim centre, known as Tirukkaṭittāṉam (in Kerala State). The Āḻvār, who got scent of it, felt greatly elated over the Lord's overwhelming love for him. He gives vent to his resultant joy, in this decad.

elliyum kālaiyum taṉṉai ninaintu eḻa,
nalla aruḷkaḷ namakkē tartū-aruḷceyvāṉ—
alli am taṇ am tuḻāy muṭi appaṉ ūr,
celvarkaḷ vāḻum, tirukkaṭittāṉamē. (VIII–6–1)

Translation

Tirukkaṭittāṉam, where reside the devotees rich, is the place
Where my Lord sporting tulaci garland cool and lovely, on
His crown, stays,
And salves us, shedding on us solely His extra-ordinary grace
And making us meditate on Him always [day and night].

Notes

(i) The Āḻvār is indeed overwhelmed by the Lord's spontaneous grace. Well, he doesn't take it on a *quid-pro-quo* basis, that is, he does not look at this influx of the Lord's extra-ordinary grace, making him meditate on Him day and night, as compensation for the grief he experienced in the last decad, but as one shed on him for the Lord's own pleasure and exultation, at His sweet will. What more? The Āḻvār feels that the Lord has not shed on any one else, not even the 'Nityas' in Heaven, grace of this magnitude. It is indeed most gratifying to the Āḻvār that the Lord presents Himself in Tirukkaṭittāṉam, wearing the tulaci garland, pretty and fragrant, as longed for by him in the third song of the last decad.

(ii) *Rich devotees*: The text of the song, as in the original refers to this pilgrim centre, as one inhabited by rich persons. The richness, alluded to here, is, however, not of the material kind but the '*Kaiṅkarya Śrī*' like

that of Lakṣmaṇa who served Lord Rāma in all possible ways and was thus extremely rich in divine service. Real affluence lies in eternal service to the Lord.

tirukkaṭittāṉamum eṉṉuṭaic cintaiyum
orukkaṭuttu, uḷḷē uṟaiyum pirāṉ kaṇṭīr-
ceruk kaṭuttu aṉṟu tikaitta arakkarai,
uruk keṭa, vāḷi poḻinta oruvaṉē. (VIII–6–2)

The Lord, who lovingly resides in Tirukkaṭittāṉam and my heart alike,
Is none but the Warrior great, Who arrows did rain
On the Asuras, who, filled with pride, had grown
Violent and war-mad, and destroyed them, in bulk.

Note

The Āḻvār acknowledges the Lord's great gesture in quelling the Asuras, symbolic of the clearing up of all the evil forces in him, the impediments that stood in the way of the Lord reclaiming him and thereafter, stepping on to Tirukkaṭittāṉam, the spring-board, whence He was to land right in the Āḻvār's heart, His ultimate destination. The Lord's attachment to the Jñāni's physical form even surpasses His love for the pilgrim centres, where He has condescended to shed His grace on the votaries in His 'Arca' Form. This is quite understandable, seeing that the very purpose of His manifestation in 'Arca' Form, is only to get hold of His subjects, by some means or the other. And when He gets His catch all right, and a big haul at that, His gratification knows no bounds. The Lord's stay in the pilgrim centres is thus not an end in itself but only a means for the reclamation of His subjects, His ultimate destination being the heart-centre of the subjects, spiritually regenerated through His redemptive grace. Once the destination is reached, the means employed for reaching it get relegated to a place of secondary importance. It is then the turn of a devotee like Pēy Āḻvār to request the Lord not to relax His interest in the pilgrim centres which operate as the spring-board whence the Lord could reach His devotees. It is now a case of the Lord loving the pilgrim centres, firstly, as

places adored by His devotees, and secondly, out of gratitude to those centres for helping Him to relcaim the subjects, by making them God-bent (See aphorisms 169-174 of Śrī Vacana Bhūṣaṇam).;

oruvar, iruvar, ōr mūvar, eṉa niṉṟu,
uruvu karantu, uḷḷumtōṟum tittippāṉ-
tiru amar mārvaṉ, tirukkaṭittāṉattai
maruvi uṟaikiṉṟa māyap pirāṉē. (VIII–6–3)

Translation

The Warrior Great, Who did arrows on Asuras rain
Was seen first as one, then as two and three later on,
And at one time hardly visible; this wondrous Benefacter great,
Who bears Tiru (Lakṣmī) on His chest, does in Tirukkaṭittāṉam lovingly stay
And is indeed very sweet to contemplate.

Notes

(i) This song does not stand by itself, being but a follow-up of the preceding song. The warrior, referred to, is Śrī Rāma. When Rāvaṇa unleashed his special Reserve forces (Mūlabalam), after the valiant Rākṣasas had vanished, one by one, into the jaws of death, the manner in which this extra-ordinary situation, which struck unspeakable terror in the minds of the Devas, was handled by Śrī Rāma, is alluded to here. The battle was as spectacular as it was terrific and Vālmīki was simply thrilled by the uncanny and superhuman effort, displayed by Sri Rama. In śloka 22 of chapter 94 of Yuddha Kāṇḍa, it has been said that Rāma was hardly visible and yet, one could see the enormous extent of destruction wrought by Him. This only reveals the marvellous agility with which He went gyrating around, routing the enemy forces. A little further down, in ślokā 27, it has been stated that thousands of Rāmas were seen in action. Again, in the latter half of the same śloka, it has been stated that Rāma alone and

none else could be seen on the battlefield. It was indeed a wonderful wonder of wonders the way the Lord encountered the enemies who were not only powerful but also very elusive.

(ii) The Lord exhibits even greater love towards the Āḷvār than that bestowed on the Divine Consort, borne on His very chest, the simple reason that he is Her ward. Again, the Lord loves Tirukkaṭittāṉam, only because it is adored by the Āḷvār. This has already been set out, at length, in the notes below the second song. Yet, it is mentioned here,only to reveal the Āḷvār's immense jubilation, as he meditates on this aspect.

māyap pirāṉ, eṉa valviṉai māyntu aṟa,
nēcattiṉāl neñcam-nāṭu kuṭikoṇṭāṉ-
tēcattu amarar tirukkaṭittāṉattai
vācap poḻil maṉṉu kōyil koṇṭāṉē. (VIII–6–4)

Translation

The wondrous Lord, Who, in Tirukkaṭittāṉam, stands enshrined,
Abounding in orchards, full of fragrance, the lovely resort
Of even the Celestials bright, has lovingly sought
The kingdom of my heart, to get my dire sins ruined.

Note

Whereas the Lord gives 'dharśan' to the votaries in the pilgrim centres only during stated hours, mostly by day, He stays for ever, in the heart of the Āḷvār, coveted by Him a great deal. This very thought, coupled with the realisation of the fact that the Lord has chosen to grace Tirukkaṭittāṉam, only to please him, has heightened the Āḷvār's joy.

kōyil koṇṭāṉ taṉ tirukkaṭittāṉattai;
kōyil koṇṭān ataṉōṭum eṉ neñcakam;-
kōyilkoḷ teyvam ellām toḻa, vaikuntam
kōyil koṇṭa kuṭakkūtta ammāṉē. (VIII–6–5)

Translation

The Lord Who is by the exalted Celestials adored,
Who has the high Heavens as His abode,
Who (as Kṛṣṇa) did the wondrous pot-dance perform
Is the One Who made Tirukkaṭittāṉam His home,
And has, along with that home, moved now into my heart,
Making it His new habitat.

Notes

(i) As already elucidated, Tirukkaṭittāṉam was but the stepping stone, the spring-board whence the Lord could get into the Āḷvār's heart. The Lord initially thought of entering the Āḷvār's heart, all alone, without His retinue and all that. But then, He changed His mind and entered the Alvar's heart along with that pilgrim centre itself c.f. Periyāḷvār Tirumoḷi V-2-10, where Peryāḷvār says that the Lord resorted unto his body with His entire retinue, the serpent-bed, the Milk-ocean and the Divine Consort and rested on the cool crest of the ocean, to grant him the necessary protection.

(ii) The Lord incarnated as Kṛṣṇa, among the cowherds and performed the pot-dance; to get over the resultant fatigue, He relased Himself at Tirukkaṭittāṉam and thence shifted to the Āḷvār's heart, along with that pilgrim centre.

kūtta ammāṉ, koṭiyēṉ iṭar muṟṟavum
māytta ammāṉ, matucūta ammāṉ, uṟai,
pūtta poḻil taṉ tirukkaṭittāṉattai
ētta, nillā-kuṟikkoḷmiṉ iṭarē. (VIII–6–6)

Translation

Tirukkaṭittāṉam, the holy centre, cool and nice, amid orchards, in full bloom,
Where resides my Lord of wondrous deeds, Matucūtaṉ, my Sire,
Who did, in full, destroy the miseries of this sinner dire,

Will set at naught our miseries, one and all, be sure,
The moment we adore it, with love supreme.

Note

Lest the preceding song should give some the impression that the pilgrim centre, known as Tirukkaṭittāṉam, has ceased to exist as such, having entered the Āḻvār's heart, *en masse* the Āḻvār now calls upon his fellow-beings to worship the holy centre. As already elaborated upon in the notes below the second song of this decad, the pilgrim centres acquire importance, firstly, as places adored by the Lord's devotees and hence loved by the Lord as well, and secondly, as the centres of attraction helping the Lord to reclaim His subjects, by making them God-bent and hence gratefully loved by the Lord.

koḷmiṉ, iṭar keṭa, uḷḷattu-kōvintaṉ,
maṇ viṇ muḻutum aḷanta oṇ tāmarai
maṇṇavar tām toḻa, vāṉavar tām vantu
naṉṉu tirukkaṭittāṉa nakarē. (VIII–6–7)

Translation

Set your mind on Tirukkaṭittāṉam, the holy city,
Where the people of this land worship the lotus feet lovely,
Of Kōvintaṉ, which, the earth and the regions above, did measure wholly,
And the denizens of heaven also come down and adore,
So that all your miseries do instantly disappear.

Notes

(i) In the preceding song, the Āḻvār exhorted the worldlings to worship this pilgrim centre but here he says it would suffice if they just think of the place.

(ii) Even as Heaven is the land of the Nityas (Eternal Heroes), the pilgrim centres on Earth belong to us, the earthlings, as Nampiḷḷai would put it. It should indeed be a matter of deep wonder to the exalted 'Nityas' in Heaven, with profound knowledge, how the Great Lord abides in the midst of the worldlings over here, steeped in dark nescience and is easily accessible to them, an act of grace galore, denoting His amazing simplicity, the very antithesis of Heavenly grandeur and majesty (Paratva or transcendent glory). And so, it is a case of the 'Nityas' coming down here to have a taste of His amazing simplicity, even as those over here go up to Heaven to witness and enjoy His transcendent glory.

tāṉa nakarkaḷ talaiccirantu eṅkeṅkum—
vāṉ, in nilam, kaṭal-muṟṟum em māyaṟkē
āṉaviṭattum, eṉ neñcum tirukkaṭit-
tāṉa nakarum taṉa tāyap patiyē. (VIII–6–8)

Translation

This earth, the yonder Heaven, the Milk-ocean and other habitats
Are, no doubt, elegant and exhilarating, which my Lord befit
And yet, Tirukkaṭittāṉam, the holy city and my heart
Are just the ones, the Lord has chosen as His favourite spots.

Note

There are innumerable delectable centres here, there (Heaven) and elsewhere, which could regale the Lord. Still, Tirukkaṭittāṉam and the Āḻvār's heart are the only two regions, which the Lord feels compelled to enjoy and esteem, as devolving on Him as a matter of right.

tāyap patikaḷ talaiccirantu eṅkeṅkum,
māyattiṉāl maṉṉi, vīṟṟiruntāṉ-uṟai,
tēcattu amarar tirukkaṭittāṉattuḷ,
āyarkku atipati, aṟputaṉ-tāṉē. (VIII–6–9)

Translation

Tirukkaṭittāṉam, the loving resort of even Celestials bright,
Is where the wondrous Chief of cowherds (Kaṇṇaṉ) alights,
With pleasure immense, looking upon it as the best
Of the pilgrim centres that do all over exist.

Note

All pilgrim centers, without distinction of big and small are sacred indeed, and yet, the Lord covets Tirukkaṭittāṉam most, being the centre which enabled Him to gain access to the Āḻvār by exhibiting to the latter His grandeur as well as grace galore, His amazing simplicity.

aṟputaṉ, nārāyaṇaṉ, ari, vāmaṉaṉ,
niṟpatu-mēvi iruppatu eṉ neñcakam—
nal pukaḻ vētiyar nāṉmaṟai niṉṟu atir
kaṟpakac cōlait tirukkaṭittāṉamē. (VIII–6–10)

Translation

'Tis only to stay lovingly in my heart, His ultimate abode,
Nārāyaṇan, Who is also Ari and Vāmaṉaṉ, the wondrous Lord,
Stands in Tirukkaṭittāṉam, with lovely orchards,
Where the celebrated brahmins reside,
Chanting the Vedas four, for ever and aloud.

Note

In order to gain access to the Āḻvār, the Lord came down to Tirukkaṭittāṉam and stood there. Once He got on to His destination, the Āḻvār's heart-centre, He would stay there only all the time.

cōlait tirukkaṭittāṉattu uṟai tiru-
mālai matiḻ kurukūrc caṭakōpaṉ col
pālōṭu amutu aṉṉa āyirattu ip pattum
mēlai vaikuntattu iruttum-viyantē. (VIII–6–11)

Translation

These songs ten, out of the thousand delicious songs,
Gracefully composed by Kurukūr Caṭakōpaṉ, adoring
The Lord Who resides in Tirukkaṭittāṉam, abounding
In orchards many, will the chanters thereof elevate
Unto the exalted Heaven with delight great.

Notes

(i) These ten songs will, by themselves, elevate their chanters to the high Heavens, on the ground that the Lord shall not brook separation from them even for a trice. This, of course, means that the Lord will be greatly delighted to hear these songs and, in the exuberance of His joy, instantly lift the chanters up to His heavenly abode.

(ii) The songs relate the glory of the great Lord and their author is no less than His most beloved Saint Nammāḻvār. The text, in the original, says that these songs are delicious like the milk porridge (rice boiled in milk and neatly spiced); the Lord constitutes the milk and the Āḻvār's songs, the other ingredients, put together—a delightful combination of diction and subject-matter and manner of expression.

Eighth Centum–Seventh Decad (VIII-7)
(Iruttum, viyantu)

Preamble

The bliss enjoyed by the Āḻvār in this decad, stands on a pedestal of its own. It can even be asserted that there is no comparable decad in the whole hymnal.

When one pauses and ponders which indeed is the greater of the two pulls, namely, the Lord's effort to get at the Āḻvār and the Āḻvār's desire to get at Him, it will be seen that the Lord exerts the greater, naturally, the stronger pull, His desire to get at the subject, His coveted belonging, being supreme. Did He not declare, in His 'Song Celestial', that the gnostic, who knows Him truly, is undoubtedly responsible for His very existence and that it is very hard to find a truly discerning devotee who looks upon Him as everything, the highest goal, the Sole Means, Father, Mother, Friend, Refuge, Resting place etc.? It is, therefore, abundantly clear that the Lord considers it His greatest gain to reclaim a Jīva (individual soul) and, to this end, He goes on preparing the ground, all the time. His intense longing to get at the individual Soul is virtually the copper plate, establishing His right of ownership over the subject, sought to be reclaimed. And, therefore, the Lord mingles with the Āḻvār with such an inordinate longing. Noticing this, the Āḻvār realises with a stinging sense of shame that he had tried to reverse the role by begging of the Lord for his redemption

overlooking the fact that it was the Lord who was all along been the supplicant for the Āḻvār's love unto Him. The Āḻvār acknowledges in this decad with great feeling the enormous love bestowed by the Lord on the individual Soul, as the indefatigable cultivator of God-love in the latter.

iruttum, viyantu eṉṉait taṉ poṉ aṭikkīḻ, eṉṟu
aruttittu, eṉaittu ōr pala nāḷ aḻaittēṟku,
poruttam uṭai vāmaṉaṉ tāṉ pukuntu, eṉ-taṉ
karuttai uṟa, vīṟṟiruntāṉ-kaṇṭu koṇṭē. (VIII–7–1)

Translation

Vāmaṉaṉ, my Lord, Whose grace I invoked, days on end,
To lift me unto His golden feet, has, I find,
Been very Keen Himself to get hold of me and now come
Right inside me, looking at me, all the time.

Note

The Āḻvār was beseeching the Lord all along, panting and craving for Him, to come and reign in his heart. This was indeed superfluous for the Lord is even more enamoured of the Āḻvār and He has, all the time, been looking forward to getting hold of the Āḻvār and being firmly lodged in his heart. And now, He has got inside the Āḻvār and He keeps looking at him with doting love, like unto a father who keeps looking at his beloved son, just recovered from a dire disease generally known to be fatal. As a matter of fact, the Āḻvār has survived the deep yearning of his, in VIII-5 (Māyakkūttā) to which he could have as well succumbed. Even as the Lord, as Vāmana, sought out Mahābali and snatched away his possessions, the Lord sought the Āḻvār and took over from him, his deep longing, and with a longing of even greater intensity, He took hold of the Āḻvār and got inside him.

iruntāṉ kaṇṭukoṇṭu-eṉatu ēlai neñcu āḷum
tiruntāta ōr aivarait tēyntu aṟa, maṉṉi;
perum tāḷ kaḷiṟṟukku aruḷceyta perumāṉ
tarum tāṉ aruḷ-tāṉ iṉi yāṉ aṟiyēnē. (VIII–7–2)

Translation

The Lord's grace unto the elephant, with feet large,
Does in my eyes no longer loom large,
For standing within me, firmly lodged,
He has worn down to naught the cruel senses five,
Which had kept my fickle mind in their grip tight
And He now keeps gazing at me, all the time.

Notes

What the Lord did unto the Āḻvār was to destroy his formidable opponents, the five senses and wean him away from their mischief by exhibiting His charming beauty.

In the case of Gajendra, the elephant, it was, no doubt, a long and grim struggle but it was just an encounter with a single crocodile, as against the five crocodiles, the five formidable senses, the Āḻvār was pitted against. And then, the venue was a mere pond in the case of Gajendra, whereas it was the vast ocean of Samsāra in which the Āḻvār was caught up. Again, Gajendra's struggle with the crocodile lasted a bare thousand years, while the Āḻvār's grim battle with life went right through a staggering past. Further, the Lord has got right inside the Āḻvār and keeps on looking at him with the same avidity with which a pauper from generations, keeps gazing at his new-found treasure. It has been said in Rāmāyaṇa that, after Śrī Rāma befriended Sugrīva, the monkey king, the two of them used to sit gazing at each other with insatiable joy, days on end. There at least, it was a sort of mutual pact, what could be termed as complimentary roles. In the case of the Lord's help to the Āḻvār, however, it was all one-sided with no obligation on the Āḻvār. All these go to enhance the Lord's grace unto the Āḻvār mani-fold and make the Lord's succour of Gajendra, the elephant, pale into insignificance.

aruḷ-tāṉ iṉi yāṉ aṟiyēṉ; avaṉ eṉ uḷ,
iruḷ-tāṉ aṟa, vīṟṟiruntāṉ; itu allāl,
poruḷ-tāṉ eṉil, mūvulakum poruḷ alla:
maruḷ-tāṉ ītō? māya mayakku mayakkē? (VIII–7–3)

Translation

Indeed, I know of no grace but that of the Lord,
Who does inside me stay, dispelling the darkness within;
It seems I am unto Him the sole concern,
He values not so much even His overlordship of the three worlds,
Is it yet another mystery of His or a mere illusion?

Notes

Overwhelmed by the immensity of the Lord's love unto him, the Āḻvār feels it to be too good to be true and even suspects that it might be just an illusion.

In the preceding song, the Āḻvār deemed it an incomparable act of grace galore, on the part of the Lord to have subjugated his unrelenting senses and destroyed them. But now, he says even that dwindles down before the loving condescension with which He has got Himself lodged in the Āḻvār's heart, dispelling its erstwhile darkness. What is more, the Lord's condescension is full and complele, seeing that, in His boundless love for the Āḻvār, He has relegated even His overlordship of the Universe to a secondary place. In his unique diction, Nampiḷḷai puts it, that the Āḻvār says here " Alas! the Lord had kept me in a state of bewilderment all along, caught up in the vortex of ' Prakrti ' (Māyā) and now again, He keeps me bewildered by His extra-ordinary love unto me. "

māya mayakku mayakkāṉ, eṉṉai vañcittu;
āyaṉ, amorarkku ariēṟu, eṉatu ammāṉ
tūya cuṭarccōti taṉatu eṉ uḷ vaittāṉ—
tēcam tikaḻum taṉ tiruvaruḷ ceytē. (VIII–7–4)

Translation

The Divine Cowherd of limitless glory, even Celestials can't comprehend,
Has unto me displayed His grace galore of universal fame,
His resplendent Form immaculate, He has in my heart planted firm,
A solid reality this is and not an illusion, as I did apprehend.

Note

The Āḻvār is now quite clear in his mind, that the Lord is really regaling in his heart and avers that it is a matter beyond doubt. As a matter of fact, in His unbounded love for the Āḻvār, the immaculate Lord has set His dazzling feet, dispelling darkness and distress, inside the Āḻvār, keeping all the worlds spell-bound by this act of grace galore. Surely, He would not play ducks and drakes with His devotees and bewilder them, as He did in the case of the ungodly Duryodhana and others of his ilk.

tikaḻum taṉ tiruvaruḷ ceytu, ulakattār
pukaḻum pukaḻ tāṉ atu kāṭṭit tantu, eṉ uḷ
tikaḻum maṇik kuṉṟam oṉṟē ottu, niṉṟāṉ;
pukaḻum pukaḻ maṟṟu eṉakkum ōr poruḷē? (VIII–7–5)

Translation

Nothing more praiseworthy do I deem than the grace radiant,
Shed by the Lord, gleaming inside me like an emerald mount
And revealing to me the praises of the inhabitants
Of the worlds, heaped on Him, on this account.

Note

" Is there indeed anything more praise-worthy than this superabundant grace of the Lord in standing within me firmly, gleaming like an emerald mount? ", asks the Āḻvār. Again, this grace is twice-blest, in that the Lord feels exultant over the bestowal of His grace on the Āḻvār and the latter is also bubbling with jubilation over his being the object of the Lord's extra-ordinary love. And yet another phase, the third one is the chorus of praise sung by all the worlds for this act of grace galore on the part of the Lord and what is even more impressive is the revelation of this fact to the Āḻvār by the Lord Himself.

poruḷ maṟṟu eṉakkum ōr poruḷ-taṉṉil cīrkkat
tarumēl, piṉṉai yārkku avaṉ taṉṉaik koṭukkum-
karu māṇikkak kuṉṟattut tāmaraipōl
tiru mārpu, kāl, kaṇ, kai, cevvāy untiyāṉē? (VIII–7–6)

Translation

If the Lord, whose winsome chest and other limbs
Do a cluster of lotus flowers blooming on emerald mount resemble,
Were on me to bestow lesser gains, short of He Himself,
Is there at all any other to whom He will give of Himself?

Notes

(i) There are two broad groups of the Lord's votaries, namely, those who ask of Him boons like acquisition of wealth, freedom from rebirth and so on, while those in the other group seek none but the Lord Himself. The Āḷvār falls in the latter group, no doubt, and yet, if the Lord has given Himself unto the Āḷvār, it is because of His inordinate love for the Āḷvār and not because there are no other like-minded votaries in that group.

(ii) The enchanting description of the Lord's exquisite charm, as set out, in detail, in the original text of this song, does not stem so much from the Lord's natural charm as from the extra lustre and grandeur imparted to His whole Form, limb by limb, by His union with the Āḷvār.

(iii) Reference to the lotus flowers blooming on the crest of an emerald mount is a grand piece of poetic imagery, flight of poetic fancy.

cevvāy, unti, veṇ pal, cuṭark kuḻai tammōṭu
evvāyc cuṭarum tammil mun vaḷāyk koḷḷa,
cevvāy muṟuvalōṭu eṉatu uḷḷattu iruntu
avvāy aṉṟi, yāṉ aṟiyēṉ maṟṟu aruḷē. (VIII–7–7)

Translation

The Lord's mouth red, the navel, the teeth sparkling white,
The earlobes with pearls bedecked and all other limbs bright
Do vie with each other to attract me all right,
But I can think of nothing but the grace of the Lord Who stays
In my heart with beaming smile which on His red lips plays.

Note

Although the Lord's limbs vie with each other in casting their fascinating spell on the Āḷvār in whose heart the Lord is now lodged, His bewitching smiles, revealing His great delight in mingling with the Āḷvār, are said to attract him most. Consequently, his mind is solely fixed on these ravishing smiles and the Lord's unique grace. Like unto the flower in fresh bloom, the Lord's radiant smile illumines His entire Form, limb by limb.

aṟiyēṉ maṟṟu aruḷ; eṉṉai āḷum pirāṉār
veṟitē aruḷceyvar, ceyvārkaṭku ukantu-
ciṟiyēnuṭaic cintaiyuḷ, mūvulakum taṉ
neṟiyā vayiṟṟil koṇṭu, niṉṟoḻintārē. (VIII–7–8)

Translation

I know of no other benefaction but the stay of the Lord.
Within my frail heart, keeping in His stomach all the three worlds,
Well *in tact*; unto those of His choice, He, who has me enthralled,
Does His grace solely extend, out of His own accord.

Notes

(i) The Āḷvār expatiates on the Lord's sweet, spontaneous grace (nirhetuka krupā) inasmuch as the grace, with which He has now flooded him, is itself a matter of such voluntary grace. The Lord of the universe has shifted the venue of His vast governance to the heart-region of the Āḷvār. What else is this but the Lord's spontaneous grace and is there at all any need to adduce any other example? In this song, the Āḷvār thus pin points the Lord's spontaneous grace, extolling the Lord as one, who sheds His voluntary grace on those whom He singles out for such favours and has thus chosen to get Himself firmly lodged in the Āḷvār's mind. While the Āḷvār looks upon himself, as the lowliest of the lowly, the Lord regards him as one far more precious than all the worlds put together.

(ii) In the hymns of the Āḻvār where the Lord's grace is expounded there might appear to be mutual contradictions in some places to the superficial reader, but a critical and cogent study will remove such doubts. This position has been thrashed out in aphorisms 393 and 394 of "Śrīvacana Bhūṣaṇam"; the reader is invited to study either the original text or the English rendering thereof by the author of this work.

vayiṟṟil koṇṭu niṉṟoḻintārum, evarum,
vayiṟṟil koṇṭu niṉṟu, oru mūvulakum tam
vayiṟṟil koṇṭu niṉṟavaṇṇam niṉṟa mālai,
vayiṟṟil koṇṭu, maṉṉa vaittēṉ-matiyālē. (VIII–7–9)

Translation

The Lord, Who, in His stomach, holds with no effort,
The earthly rulers who, in their stomachs, keep their subjects,
The exalted Celestials and the worlds three,
I have consented to get firmly inside me.

Notes

(i) To a question, doggedly put to him, suggesting that there ought to be some merit in him for the Lord to bestow on him His grace, of such a magnitude, the Alvar says that the only merit in him is his passive quiescence or mere non-resistance to the influx of His grace. To those sticklers who have a fad for bargaining and would, therefore, insist upon making the influx of the Lord's grace contingent upon some kind of intiative in us, the Āḻvār's own utterances should serve as the eye-opener. Even this consent to the Lord's reclamation is induced by the Lord's grace. Therefore it is, this hymnal is replete with expressions like: "Oh, Sire, You have lifted me unto Your holy f et, after duy moulding and reconditioning my mind, so as not to stifle your effort to redeem me". See also the elucidation in aphorism 110 of 'Ācārya Hrudayam'.

(ii) By the earthly kings holding, in their astomachs, their subjects, is meant the protection extended by the former to the latter like unto the mother feeding the babe inside her womb. The Lord's retention, in His stomach, of the exalted Celestials and all the worlds with their contents, also denotes His role, as the universal Protector, a function which He discharges through a mere fraction of His resolve.

vaittēṉ matiyāl eṉatu uḷḷattu akattē;
eyttē oḻivēṉ allēṉ eṉṟum, eppōtum-
moyttu ēy tirai mōtu taṉ pāṟkaṭaluḷāl
paittu ēy cuṭarp pāmpu-aṇai nam paraṉaiyē. (VIII–7–10)

Translation

The Lord, who has the hooded serpent bright,
As His somnolent bed on the cool, milk ocean,
With surging waters, I have got fixed in my heart,
Suffer shall I no more from pangs of separation.

Note

Mere passive quiescence on the part of the Āḻvār has resulted in the Lord entering him, with all His retinue. Naturally, this has infused in the Āḻvār robust confidence that he shall no more suffer from the pangs of separation from the Lord.

cuṭarp pāmpu-aṇai nam paraṉai, tirumālai,
aṭic cērvakai vaṇ kurukūrc caṭakōpaṉ
muṭippāṉ coṉṉa āyirattu ip pattum caṉmam
viṭat tēyntu aṟa nōkkum-taṉ kaṇkaḷ civantē. (VIII–7–11)

Translation

These songs ten, out of the thousand of Kurukur Caṭakōpaṉ,
Whose natural bent it is to adore, ever and anon,
The feet of Tirumāl, Who does on the radiant serpent recline,
Aimed at the complete severence of his moorings earthly,
Will grind to a halt the chanters'cycle of birth and rebirth,
Looking on it [as it were] with red eyes [spitting deadly poison].

Notes

(i) As stated in what is known as 'Paryaṅka Vidyā, in the Upaniṣad, the Lord, seated on the serpent cushion,

along with Mahālakṣmī in that glorious setting, grants audience to the 'Muktas' (Released Souls) on their reaching Heaven. This very setting is alluded to in the opening line of this song as in the original, in keeping with the benefit accruing to the chanters of this decad as set out in this song, namely, release from the bondage of Samsāra and the terrific cycle of birth and rebirth. These ten songs, by themselves, deliver the goods, looking as it were, at the worldly ties of the chanters of these songs, with red eyes, spitting poison, so as to effectively destroy these ties and put the chanters in Heaven.

(ii) The Āḷvār's ultimate goal is the Lord's pair of feet where he longs to render incessant service, rather than the heavenly bliss, as such.

Eighth Centum—Eighth Decad (VIII-8)
(Kaṇkaḷ civantu)

Preamble

In the fifth decad of this centum (Māyak kūttā), the Āḷvār's yearning was too deep for words. The Lord responded with even greater avidity and the two of them got wrapt up in mutual delight. The Āḷvār gave vent to his jubilation in the last decad, and even so, in the eighth song of that decad, he referred to himself as a frail being, with whom the great Lord of unlimited prowess has chosen to mingle freely and stay on. The Āḷvār's frightful sense of his own pettiness, in contra-distinction to the Lord's grandeur of limitless dimensions, which was rearing up its head now and then, was studiously kept under effective check by the Lord who was apprehensive of the Āḷvār's tendency to shrink back from Him on this score. The Lord, who noticed, with great concern, a revival of this trend in the Āḷvār, wished to cut it out, there and then, root and branch. The Lord wanted to quell the Āḷvār's notion of the soul's pettiness by revealing to him its real grandeur. But then, the soul, like unto a mere glow-worm, may not hold out any appeal to the Āḷvār, profoundly struck by the Lord's exquisite charm. The other alternative for the Lord

was to exhibit the grandeur of the Āḷvār's soul along with that of His own. The Lord accordingly revealed to the Āḷvār, His charm first and then the grandeur of the Āḷvār's soul, in its relation of liegeship to the Sovereign Lord, as delectable unto Him as His ornaments. And so, in this decad, the Āḷvār dwells on the intrinsic beauty of the soul, as the exclusive vassal of the Lord, as revealed by the Lord Himself.

kaṇkaḷ civantu periyavāy, vāyum civantu kaṉintu, uḷḷē
veṉ pal ilaku cuṭar, ilaku vilaku makara kuṇṭalattaṉ,
koṇṭal vaṇṇaṉ, cuṭar muṭiyaṉ, nāṉku tōḷaṉ, kuṉi cārṅkaṉ,
oṇ caṅku katai vāḷ āḻiyāṉ, oruvaṉ-aṭiyēṉ uḷḷāṉē. (VIII-8-1)

Translation

The cloud-hued Lord of grandeur unique, with eyes, red and wide,
Reddened lips, teeth sparkling white, imposing pearl pendants,
Beaming crown, shoulders four, curvate bow, lovely conch, the sword,
The mace and discus majestic, stands, inside this vassal, resplendent.

Notes

(i) In this song, the Āḷvār goes into raptures on beholding the Lord's exquisite Form displaying the rare charm acquired by Him on His union with the Āḷvār. In VIII-5-2, the Āḷvār was with eyes fully dried and lips parched up, when he beseeched the Lord to oblige him with His sweet presence. The Lord too had undergone such modifications then and He was also off colour and lack-lustre like the Āḷvār! It was only when His union with the Āḷvār materialised, that He regained His original complexion and composure, heightened by the extra lustre imparted by the exuberance of His joy in the coveted company of the Āḷvār. The Āḷvār, who took due note of this marvellous reciprocity on the part of the Lord, got choked down to a trance state, as he meditated on the Lord's amazing simplicity and boundless love for him. This was the third and the

last spell of suspended animation, passed through by the Āḻvār, who was struck dumb and insensate every time he contemplated the Supreme Lord's extreme simplicity in bringing Himself down on a par with His devotees and some times, even relegating Himself lower still. Every time, this trance-state lasted six months, as seen from aphorism 58 of 'Ācārya Hrudayam' and Śrī Maṇavāḷa Māmuṇi's glossary thereon; the two earlier stages pertain to I-3-1 and V-10-1.

(ii) The description of the Lord and His mighty weapons, (which in the eyes of the Āḻvār loom, more as lovely jewels decorating the Lord) is that of the rejuvenated Lord, on His getting lodged in the Āḻvār's heart. This could also fit in with line 2 of Śrīman Nāthamuni's śloka, 'Yadgosahaśraṁ apahanti..........', in adoration of Saint Nammāḻvār, as per the former's yogic comprehension. There it has been said that the Bakula-flowered (Narcissus) Nammāḻvār is the Sun, beaming through the thousand rays of Tiruvāymoḻi, where Lord Śrīman Nārāyaṇa resides, wielding His discus and conch and surrounded by His entire retinue, the region adored by the Brahmins learned in the Śrutis, the cynosure of the Celestials. (See also Introduction).

(iii) What the Āḻvār envisaged within him was like unto what meets one's eyes when a box full of sparkling diamonds is thrown open.

aṭiyēṉ uḷḷāṉ; uṭal uḷḷāṉ-aṇṭattu akattāṉ, puṟattuḷḷāṉ,
paṭiyē itu eṉṟu uraikkalām paṭiyaṉ allaṉ, paramparaṉ,
kaṭicēr nāṟṟattuḷ ālai iṉpat tuṉpak kaḻi nērmai
oṭiyā iṉpap perumaiyōṉ, uṇarvil umpar oruvaṉē. (VIII-8-2)

Translation

The One, who does within me (His vassal) dwell,
Stays in this body, as well, being the Inner Soul
Of the worlds, one and all and the regions beyond, as well;
Of fragrance unique and sweet like flawless honey is His bliss
perennial,

Higher than the highest, none can His modes fathom,
He is the One, of knowledge supreme.

Note

The Āḻvār has high-lighted, in this song, 'śeṣatva' or exclusive service to the Lord, as the essential attirubute of the individual soul. Instead of saying that the Lord, Who pervades all things all over the worlds and the regions beyond (the external multiplicity of layers), stays within him and his body, he says, the Lord stays in this vassal (aṭiyēṉ) and the body (uṭal) as well. *The Āḻvār has thus identified his soul. as the servant (vassal) of the Lord, thereby bringing to the fore, the 'Śeṣatva' (servanthood) attribute of the Soul.* Although the word 'aṭiyēṉ' (self) occurs in various other songs of the Āḻvār and even in the very first song of his first hymnal (Tiruviruttam), it has connoted, in all other places, the embodied soul and not the soul, as such.

Of the two principal attributes of the Individual soul, namely, 'Jñātrutva' (bliss of wisdom or knowledge) and 'śeṣatva' (service to the Lord), why should the latter alone be taken as the essential attribute of the soul, in preference to the former? This has been examined at great length in aphorism 73 of 'Śrīvacana Bhūṣaṇam'. It is reproduced below.

If 'Jñātrutva' is held to be the sole attribute of the soul, this is also the attribute of the Lord and hence it is necessary to bring out the distinguishing feature of the individual soul. If, on the other hand, 'Śeṣatva' is held to be the sole attribute of the soul, this attribute is applicable to 'Acit' (non-sentient matter), as well, and it cannot, therefore, be the distinguishing feature of the soul. And so, both the attributes of the 'Jīva' (soul), namely, 'Jñātrutva' and 'Seshatva' are attracted. We now come back to the question, as to which of these two should be considered the essential attribute of the soul. Could it be 'Jñātrutva', which stamps out the soul from the unintelligent matter or 'Śeṣatva' which differentiates 'Jiva' from 'Īśvara' (Lord)? 'Śeśatva' or service unto the Lord, being that which sustains the individual soul and makes it thrive, this attribute naturally comes to

the fore, relegating the other attribute to the back-ground. The assumption of 'Jñātrutva', as the essential attribute of the 'Jīva', would place it on a par with the Lord and this smacks of 'Advaita' or non-difference between the two entities. This is effectively quelled by the 'Śeṣatva' aspect of the 'Jīva'. When this topic came up for discussion in Saint Rāmānuja's holy court of religious discussions, the Saint, although perfectly informed in the matter, wished to get it expounded by his Guru, Tirukkōṭṭiyūr Nampi. Kūrattāḻvāṉ, the illustrious disciple of Saint Rāmānuja, was sent, all the way to Tirukkottiyur to learn from Nampi the truth, in this regard. Even after waiting on Nampi for six long months, Āḻvān could not obtain from the grea-preceptor, any hint. But, when he sought Nampi's permist sion to return to Srirangam, the latter condescended, at long last, to pin-point the truth admirably, by pointing out: "Son, don't you know that Saint Nammāḻvār, inspired and endowed by the Lord Himself with perfect knowledge, has said '*Atiyēṉ uḷḷāṉ*' (*the opening words of this song*)?" Grasping at once the implication of this, Āḻvāṉ exclaimed with joy, "Good Sire, I am indeed blessed, I have known the truth" and returned to his Master at Srirangam. The exact import of these two words has already been set out in sub para above.

uṇarvil umpar oruvaṉai avaṉatu aruḷāl uṟaṟ poruttu, eṉ
uṇarviṉ uḷḷē iruttiṉēṉ-atuvum avaṉatū in aruḷē;
uṇarvum, uyirum, uṭampum, maṟṟu ulappilaṉavum, paḻutēyām
uṇarvaip peṟa, ūrntu, iṟa ēṟi, yāṉum tāṉāy oḻintāṉē.
(VIII–8–3)

Translation

To get at the overlord of the celestials of knowledge profound,
I did His grace invoke, impounding Him in my thoughtful desires;
Even this act of mine was by His sweet grace ordained,
Getting inside me thus, He did make me wholly averse
To the earthly moorings, body and soul, pleasures sensual
And allied knowledge; He did unto me fully reveal

The essential nature of the soul, as His exclusive vassal,
Who can't, apart from Him, remain viable.

Note

By His spontaneous grace, the Supreme Lord made the Āḻvār God-bent and also revealed unto him, the true nature of his Soul, in order to stabilise his God-love, to the exclusion of everything else. The true nature of the Soul, as belonging to the Lord, as His exclusive vassal, and remaining but His mode, His very body, was discolosed to the Āvḻār so that he shall not shrink back from Him, any longer.

yāṉum tāṉāy oḻintāṉai-yātum, evarkkum muṉṉōṉai—
tāṉum, civaṉum, piramaṉum ākip paṉaitta taṉimutalai-
tēṉum, pālum, kaṉṉalum, amutum ākit tittittu, eṉ
ūṉil, uyiril, uṇarviṉil niṉṟa oṉṟai-uṇarntēṉē. (VIII–8–4)

Translation

Realised have the one unto whom I stand indissolubly bound;
My soul, which does thro' my body, spirit and intellect extend,
Is His body, delectable unto Him like honey, milk, candy and nectar,
To things and beings, one and all, He is anterior,
The Primate unique, who did the Trinity compose and stand
Alongside Civaṉ and Piramaṉ, whose functions He ordained.

Note

The Lord has now made the Āḻvār aware of the fact that his soul is indeed extremely delectable to Him. No doubt, all things and beings, with different forms and names, were ushered in by Him alone, and yet, in the process, He pursued different modes of operation. The ungodly and those not bent towards Him were created solely in the light of their past actions; Brahmā, Rudra and other Devas, hankering after wealth and power, were assigned positions where they could wield such power and command wealth; in the case of the Āḻvār, however, He demonstrated unto him the fact of his soul being exclusively His, highly enjoyed by Him, thereby making him realise that he is not apart

from Him, being but His body, an attribute to Him, as whiteness is to a white wall or white cloth. Prior to the dawn of this knowledge, the individual relished the soul as his own and now he relishes the soul as the Lord's, even as the Lord lavishes his affections on it as His attribute.

niṉṟa oṉṟai uṇarntēṉukku, ataṉ nuṇ nērmai-atu itu eṉṟu—
oṉṟum oruvarkku, uṇaralākātu; uṇarntum, mēlum kāṇpu-aritu;
ceṉṟu ceṉṟu, paramparam āy, yātum iṉṟit tēyntu aṟṟu,
naṉṟu, tītu eṉṟu aṟivu-aritāy, naṉṟāy ñāṉam kaṭantatē.

(VIII–8–5)

Translation

The subtle beauty of the Soul, eternal and intelligent, the Lord's attribute,
None can comprehend, in terms concrete, as this or that
And much less visualise; 'tis indeed very much apart
From matter and does its components, one by one, excel;
One can't with things material compare and tell,
'Tis good or bad and yet He did reveal
Unto me, in its true perspective, my soul.

Note

In the opening song of this hymnal (I-1-1), the Āḻvār acknowledged the fact that he had been gracisoulsy endowed by the Lord with knowledge, full and complete. Knowledge of his soul, its characteristics, sepecial features and inter-relation with the Lord etc., would have doubtless been imparted to him then, as part of the vast range of that knowledge. The emphasis, however, rested on God-love (matinalam) and all that knowledge acquired by the Āḻvār got rooted in it. (Bhaktirūpāpanna Jñāna). The Āḻvār did not, therefore, turn his attention to the study of his soul, as such, a mere firefly, compared with the splendour of the Supreme Lord. It has, however, become necessary now for the Lord to impress upon the Āḻvār the grandeur of his soul and its glorious impact on Him, in the particular context, explained in the preamble to this decad. The Lord has now condescended to exhibit the soul as His mode, that is, one related to Him, as the predicate is to the subject or attribute

is to substance. Even the wisest and the best informed individuals, with the most strenuous mental effort (yoga) or psychic meditation, cannot perceive this wonderful entity, the soul (Ātmā) not comparable with the external objects, with form and content, discerned by the senses. The soul transcends the several vestures veiling it, which could be grouped as 'body' (annamaya) or as the senses, 'prāṇa' or the vital spirit (Prāṇamaya) or 'manas' (manomaya), the mind, or 'buddhi', the will. Not falling within the mischief of the modifications and corruptions to which all these are subject, the soul is very subtle and distinct from any of these, not cognisable as 'good' or 'bad', being outside the purview of sense-knowledge. Neither by speech nor by any process of thought would it be possible to disclose the true nature of the soul in its entirety, even by those who have made great advance in spiritual knowldge. c.f. what the Lord said to Arjuna in Bhagavad Gita. "To know, to see and to enter into the true nature of the soul is difficult". The soul is thus, by itself, a unique entity (truth), characterised by its own special attributes of intelligence (Jñāna) and bliss (ānanda).

As the illustrious Ācārya Empār would put it, in the preceding songs, the soul was referred to as an appendage to the Lord, His dependent, an attribute (viśeṣaṇa), the Lord being the substance (viśeṣya); in the four songs commencing from this one, the soul is dealt with as a singular entity, characterised by its own attributes of intelligence (Jñāna) and bliss (Ānanda).

naṉṟāy ñāṉam kaṭantupoy, nal intiriyam ellām īrttu, (tu,
oṉṟāykkiṭanta arum perum pāḻ ulappu il-ataṉai uṇarntu uṇarn-
ceṉṟu āṅku, iṉpat tuṉpaṅkaḷ ceṟṟuk kaḷaintu, pacai aṟṟāl,
aṉṟē appōtē vīṭu; atuvē vīṭu-vīṭāmē. (VIII–8–6)

Translation

If one can the cruel senses discard, going well beyond.
The sense-objects and the sprawling domain of matter transcend,

Discern the soul as a distinct entity and its true natu e comprehend,
Abjure, with all one's heart, the fruits of actions, good and bad,
There and there lies the realisation of the soul from bondage freed.

Note

The Āḻvār sets out here the enormous effort needed for the perception of one's soul, dissociated from its material moorings, through the Yogic practices, aimed at the conquest of the senses etc. The practicant has to discern, first of all, the soul as a separate entity, apart from the inert natter with which it is intricately wound up, like oil in seeds, fire in wood etc. The next step will be to get oneself weaned away from the sensual pleasures, the Prakṛti or matter-oriented desires, which are little better than one aspiring for a rich harvest in a vast desert area, a huge waste land, non-cultivable and, therefore, lying fallow. Even after giving up the inert matter as unavailing, the acts giving rise to the fruits, know as 'Puṇya' and 'Papa' will get one stuck up in worldy life. Therefore, these should also be given up with no chance of their revival, by striking at the roots and cutting out the age-long propensities and the odours driven underground. The soul, thus released from bondage, could, unless the practicant was short-sighted, merely looking upon such emancipation as the final goal, be steeped in the eternal service of the Lord without let or hindrance, the destined goal. The other alternative will be to get lost in self-enjoyment, the disembodied soul enjoying itself, without turning its attention on the service of the Lord. Of course, this alternative which the Āḻvār has elsewhere, in this hymnal, referred to as a great disaster, is indeed farthest from his mind.

atuvē vīṭu; vīṭupēṟṟu iṉpam tāṉum atu; tēṟi,
etuvē tāṉum paṟṟu iṉṟi, yātum ilikaḷ ākiṟkil,
atuvē vīṭu; vīṭupēṟṟu inpam tāṉum atu; tēṟātu,
etuvē vīṭu? ētu iṉpam? eṉṟu eyttār-eyttār, eyttārē. (VIII–8–7)

Translation

The vision thus gained, of the soul, the Lord's attribute,
Freed from worldly desires and material contacts, does constitute
True emancipation and the bliss which from it accrues;
Those, who are about this not clear and get confused,
Will for ever remain so, "asking what is heaven and heavenly bliss?"

Note

The Āḻvār affirms that this and this alone (the *modus operandi*, indicated in the preceding song) is the way to achieve self-realisation and the bliss resulting therefrom. Attempts made, in any other manner, will not fructify. It is only through a total abandonment of all desires passing in one's mind, except the desire for the 'Ātman' (Self, forming the Lord's attribute), with no chances of their sprouting again, one is said to be steady in the knowledge of the Self (Bhagaved Gita II-55). With a mind steadied in this manner, the vision of the soul is acquired and such an acquisition is, however, worthless, if it does not hinge upon the service of the Lord, in keeping with the essential nature of the soul.

eyttār, eyttār, eyttār eṉṟu, illattārum puṟattārum
moyttu, āṅku alaṟi muyaṅka, tām pōkumpōtu, uṉmattarpōl
pittē ēṟi, anurākam poḻiyumpōtu, em pemmāṉōṭu
ottē ceṉṟu, aṅku uḷḷam kūṭak kūṭiṟṟākil-nal uṟaippē.
(VIII–8–8)

Translation

One has indeed to steer clear of all temptations,
The spurt of desires and fix the mind, in great devotion,
On the Lord during those lingering, last moments
Of one's life, when friends and relations gather around and lament,
Wailing aloud, "oh, he is gone! he is gone! he is gone!"
With their minds agitated, like unto madmen.

Note

The Āḻvār stresses here the importance of meditation on the Lord, with absolute calm and clarity, during the last moments

of one's life, when the whole scene is so tense and bewildering, what with the wanton wailing of the relatives and friends and the terrible off-chance of a sudden spurt of all suppressed desires and unrealised ambitions. It is noteworthy that even stanzas four to eight of this decad, which deal with the characteristics of the 'Jīva' (Individual Soul) are rooted in the 'Śeśatva' (servanthood) aspect of the soul. The Āḷvār is indeed grateful to the Lord for such revelation.

kūṭiṟṟākil, nal uṟaippu; kūṭāmaiyaik kūṭiṉāl,
āṭal-paṟavai uyar koṭi em māyaṉ āvatu; atu atuvē;
vīṭaip paṇṇi, oru paricē, etirvum nikaḷvum kaḷivumāy
ōṭit tiriyum yōkikaḷum uḷarum-illai allarē. (VIII–8–9)

Translation

It will be good, no doubt, if there can be a blend
Of the soul with the Super-Soul but it will be a notion blind,
That the soul could itself become the Lord with the flying bird
On His banner, oh, what a grotesque misfit indeed!
Pity! there exist such perverts gross, at all times, who wallow
In family ties, with all fanciful notions of the final goal.

Notes

(i) Meditation of the Lord during the last moments of one's life, emphasised by the Āḷvār in the preceding song, stresses incidentally the basic difference between the two entities, namely, the 'Jīva' (individual soul) and 'Paramātmā' (Īśvara, the Supreme Lord). Unfortunately, there are perverts, extant in this world at all times, who propagate fanciful notions that the individual soul, rid of nescience, becomes 'Brahman' and thereafter, there is but a single entity, namely, 'Brahman', the other entity, the 'Jīva' having ceased to exist, as such. The Āḷvār now condemns such heresies.

(ii) If the impossible happens, that is, the incompatibles blending into one, as in the fanciful event of the individual soul and the Super-Soul (the Supreme Lord) blending into a single entity, the Āḷvār wonders what a grotesque and preposterous misfit it would turn out to be. The individual soul can then be the Master of Garuḍa, the Eternal Hero and fly on him. But this cannot be, flying on Garuḍa being the sole prerogative of the Lord. It is indeed a pity that there have been in the past, there are at present and there will be in the future, persons expounding such heretical doctrines according to their individual fancies.

uḷarum illai allarāy, uḷarāy illai ākiyē,
uḷar-em oruvar: avar vantu eṉ uḷḷattuḷḷē uṟaikiṉṟār:
vaḷarum piṟaiyum tēy piṟaiyum pōla, acaivum ākkamum,
vaḷarum cuṭarum iruḷum pōl, teruḷum maruḷum māyttōmē.
(VIII–8–10)

Translation

Unto His devotees He can never cease to be and does always subsist
While, unto others, He is not, though He does always exist;
Such a unique Lord does in my heart now subsist,
And in me knowledge clear prevails, with no fluctuation
Like the Moon waxing and waning, darkness and sunshine.

Note

The Āḷvār rejoices that the Lord, who enthralled him by exhibiting His auspicious traits, exquisite beauty and cosmic wealth, has now entered his heart, dispelling all doubts and discrepancies to which the perverts succumb and infusing in him knowledge, steady and sound, unlike the fluctuating fortunes of the Sun and the Moon. The solar day is followed by the dark night while the Moon waxes for some time and then wanes. The Āḷvār's knowledge of the Divine is, however, not subject to such fluctuations, rise and fall.

teruḷum maruḷum māyttu, taṉ tiruntu cempoṉ kaḻal aṭikkīḻ
aruḷi iruttum ammāṉām, ayaṉām, civaṉām tirumālāl
aruḷap paṭṭa caṭakōpaṉ ōr āyirattuḷ ip pattāl
aruḷi, aṭikkīḻ iruttum nam aṇṇal karumāṇikkamē. (VIII–8–11)

Translation

The Lord of sapphire hue will bless and under His feet retain
The chanters of these songs ten out of the unique thousand of Caṭakōpaṉ,
Blest by Tirumāl (Lord Supreme), Who inside Ayaṉ and Civaṉ stays
As their Internal Controller, infuses knowledge, firm and sound, and takes
His devotees unto His victorious feet, with lovely anklets of gold bedecked.

Note

All knowledge that militates against God-love and God-enjoyment will be rooted out and unalloyed knowledge of the Divine infused in the chanters of this decad by the Supreme Lord who discharges the triple functions of creation, sustentation and dissolution, the first and last being got done by Brahmā and Rudra, Himself standing within them as their Internal Controller. What more? They shall be lifted by Him unto His lovely feet, without being allowed to bow unto others and fall at their feet.

Eighth Centum—Ninth decad (VIII-9)
(Karu māṇikka malai)

Preamble

This decad is spelt out by a mate of Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī (Āḻvār, figuratively turned into a female lover). In the entire hymnal, there are three decads of this type and this is the last of the series, the two earlier ones being IV-6 and VI-5. In IV-6, the mate advised the elders, gathered around Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī, who were treading the mis-guided path of invoking minor deities to cure the Nāyakī's malady, to desist from their wrong methods and smear the Nāyakī's body with the dust from the feet of Śrī Vaiṣṇavas. In VI-5, it may be recalled, the mates pointed out to the elders, the futility of their trying to extricate the Nāyakī, completely absorbed in the Deity at Tolaivillimaṅkalam, having committed the initial mistake of taking her to that pilgrim centre and then brought her face to face with the Deity there.

The background of this decad is, as follows:

Seeing that Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī (Āḻvār) has come of marriageable age, the parents make known to the folks in the town their intention to get her married to an eligible bachelor. Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī is, however, fiercely steeped in the Supreme Lord. As a matter of fact, she has already had secret contacts with the Lord, enshrined in KuṭṭanāṭṭuTiruppuliyūr (Kerala State), of which her parents were not aware. The mate, who enjoys the Nāyakī's confidence, however, knew about it from the change wrought in the Nāyakī's person and the manner of her talking, but she was afraid of inviting the wrath of the elders upon herself, in case she publicised the truth about the Nāyakī. At the same time, if the truth was not revealed to the elders, they might go ahead with the unwholesome project of getting the Nāyakī married off locally to some one and embarrass poor Nāyakī who might keep reticent out of shyness. Caught thus, in the horns of a dilemma, the mate hits upon a via-media to tide over the situation. The mate makes it appear that she has just got to know about the Nāyakī's affair with the Lord at Kuṭṭanāṭṭu. Tiruppuliyūr and points out to the elders that, in view of this development, it would no longer be feasible for them to pursue their former plans. This brings to the fore the Nāyakī's inalienability from the Lord to whom she stands totally dedicated as the object of His exclusive enjoyment. Thus, the essential nature of the soul, as set out in the last decad, gets crystallised still further in this decad.

It deserves to be noted that, enlightened by the Lord about the soul's grandeur as His vassal, highly delectable to Him, the Āḻvār is mighty jubilant, to the point of being turned into the feminine state (Nāyakī). The Āḻvār, thus transformed, highlights the current mood of the Nāyakī, her total dedication to the Lord as His exclusive vassal in the esoteric sense, adopting the theme as above. In fact, this is the solitary decad in the entire hymnal, where the Nāyakī gives vent to her joy, indirectly though. In all other decads reflecting the Nāyakī stance, she is in a state of extreme discomfiture due to the immediate non-fulfilment of her particular longing.

karu māṇikka malaimēl maṇit taṭam tāmaraik kāṭukaḷ pōl,
tirumārvu, vāy, kaṇ, kai, unti, kāl, uṭai-āṭaikaḷ ceyya pirāṉ,
tirumāl, emmāṉ, ceḻu nīr vayal kuṭṭanāṭṭut tiruppuliyūr
aru māyaṉ pēr aṉṟip pēccu ilaḷ, aṉṉaimīr!-itaṟku eṉ ceykēṉō?
(VIII–9–1)

Translation

She utters not anything but the holy names
Of the wondrous Lord, difficult to attain, Who remains
In Kuṭṭanāṭṭu Tiruppuliyur, abounding in fields fertile,
Like unto lush forests which with large lotus flowers bristle,
Blooming over the crest of a mount of dark ruby, His lips lovely,
Chest, eyes, hands, feet, navel and robes, being red, one and all;
Ye, elders, I know not what I can do for her, at all.

Notes

(i) The mate says that the Nāyakī cannot fix her mind on anything else, having been enthralled by the exquisite beauty of the Lord enshrined in Tiruppuliyūr in Kuṭṭanāṭu (present Kerala State) and she keeps on uttering His names alone. This pilgrim centre is one of the thirteen centres, sung by the Āḻvārs, in Kerala State. There is another pilgrim centre bearing the same name in the territory comprised in the former Cōlā Kingdom (now Tamil Nāḍu), called Cōla Nāṭṭu Tiruppuliyūr. The pilgrim centre covered by this decad, is, therefore, distinctly mentioned as Kuṭṭanāṭṭu Tiruppuliyūr.

(ii) There is nothing like a dark ruby, ruby being only red. And yet, the Āḻvār has used this expression, as poetic imagery, to project the picture of the Lord of bluish complexion, of generous dimensions, whose chest bearing the Divine Mother (Mahālakṣmī), lips, hands, navel, feet and silken robes are all red. This exquisite charm would indeed be beyond the purview of our enjoyment but for His coming and staying in 'Arca' (iconic) manifestation, out of condescending love, induced by Mahālakṣmī, the Divine Consort.

aṉṉaimīr! itaṟku eṉ ceykēṉ?–aṇi mēruviṉ mītu ulavum
tuṉṉu cūḻ cuṭar ñāyiṟum, aṉṟiyum pal cuṭarkaḷum pōl,
miṉṉu nīḷ muṭi, āram pal kalaṉ-tāṉ uṭai emperumāṉ
puṉṉai am poḻil cūḻ tiruppuliyūr pukaḻum ivaḷē. (VIII–9–2)

Translation

Ye, elders, What can I do, if this lady stands lost in admiration
Of Tiruppuliyūr, abounding in lovely gardens, where remains
The Lord with the crown resplendent, garland and jewels many
Beaming like the glorious sun that on lovely mount Mēru rises
And the grand galaxy of stars luminous?

Note

The mate goes on repeating, "what can I do for this lady's condition?" just to impress upon the elders that she was not a party to this involvement of the Nāyakī and that it was a sudden development, of which neither she nor they had any inkling. Besides uttering the Lord's holy names, the Nāyakī is said to be all praises for Tiruppuliyūr which abounds in fertile fields and lovely gardens. She could also describe in detail, the Lord's beaming person, His crown, garland and jewels shining like the grand assembly of all luminous bodies; surely, this throws sufficient light on her intimate contact with the Deity over there.

pukaḻum ivaḷ niṉṟu irāppakal-poru nīrkkaṭal tīp paṭṭu, eṅkum
tikaḻum eriyoṭu celvatu oppa, ceḻum kaṭir āḻi mutal
pukaḻum poru paṭai ēnti, pōr pukku, acuraraip poṉṟuvittāṉ,
tikaḻum maṇi neṭu māṭam nīṭu, tiruppuliyūr vaḷamē.
(VIII–9–3)

Translation

This lady keeps praising the grandeur, day and night,
Of Tiruppuliyūr, where stand castles tall in lustrous array,
And stays the Lord wielding lovely weapons such as the discus bright,
Who to battle went, like the surging sea set ablaze,
Moving along with flames around, and did the Asuras rout.

Note

Here is another grand poetic imagery, the Lord of bluish tint entering the battlefield, wielding the dazzling discus and other weapons of rare excellence, being likened to the blue sea set ablaze, moving about with flames all around. Even as Sītā locked herself up in the sweet embrace of the great warrior, Śrī Rāma, the Vīra Rāghava Who stood victorious in front of her, after vanquishing, single-handed, the entire horde of Rākṣasās in *janaṣ'āna, numbering as many as fourteen thousand, in an amazingly short period, Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī is now all admiration for the warrior in Tiruppuliyūr and keeps on recounting His great prowess. This gives yet another clue to the mate about the Nāyakī's engrossment with that Deity. Even as Sītā lavished all her affections on Ayodhyā, in preference to Mithila, her birthplace, the Āḻvār is all praises for Tiruppuliyūr, giving Tirunakari, his birthplace the go-by.

ūr vaḷam kiḷar cōlaiyum, karumpum, perum cennelum cūḻntu,
ēr vaḷam kiḷar taṉ paṉaik kuṭṭanāṭṭut tirappuliyūr
cīr vaḷam kiḷar mūvulaku uṇṭu, umiḻ tēva pirāṉ
pēr vaḷam kiḷarntaṉṟip pēcu ilaḷ, iṉṟu-ip puṉai-iḻaiyē.
(VIII–9–4)

Translation

This dame with jewels bedecked, these days,
Recounts, with no respite, the holy names,
That bespeak the glory great of the Lord Who gulped down
And spat the worlds three, Who stays
In Kuṭṭanāṭṭu Tiruppuliyūr, full of lovely gardens
And rich crops of sugarcane and paddy, amid fields fertile.

Note

Lost in admiration of the enchanting environments of Tiruppuliyūr, the Nāyakī goes on describing its fauna and flora, the rich fields with extensive cultivation and all that with great delight. And then, she goes into raptures over the role of the Deity there, as the great Protector of the entire universe and talks about it, days on end, in a manner very much out of the ordinary run. As she speaks on with great zest, she brightens up and looks exceedingly charming, as if she is bedecked with jewels. The mate is led to conclude from the Nāyakī's speech and comportment that she has had contacts with the Deity at Tiruppuliyūr.

puṉai iḻaikaḷ aṇivum, āṭai uṭaiyum, putukkaṇippum
niṉaiyum nīrmaiyatu aṉṟu ivaṭku; itu niṉṟu niṉaikkappukkāl,
cuṉaiyiṉuḷ taṭam tāmarai malarum taṉ tiruppuliyūr
muṉaivaṉ, mūvulaku āḷi, appaṉ tiru-aruḷ mūḻkinaḷē.
(VIII–9–5)

Translation

The way this lady bedecks herself and dresses up
And the amorous glow on her if one pauses to look up,
One can discern, 'tis beyond comprehension [in terms earthly],
Bathed she must have been in the grace lovely,
Of the Sovereign Master of all the worlds, reigning supreme
In cool Tiruppuliyūr in whose ponds lotus flowers are in full bloom.

Note

The mate is gradually getting into the thick of the subject, by way of adducing incontrovertible evidence of the Nāyakī's involvement with the Deity at Tiruppuliyūr, in order to convince the Nāyakī's mother, still bent upon binding her daughter to the earthly home and hearth. The mate's initial suspicion about the Nāyakī's intimacy with the Deity at Tiruppuliyūr gets confirmed on three counts, namely, (i) the manner in which the jewels are worn by the Nāyakī at present, differs from that in which they were worn before, revealing the fact of their having been interferred with by some one else, removed and put back on her person; (2) her clothes also bear evidence of similar interference, and (3) the wholesome change in her complexion and comportment like unto the parched-up-land getting flushed with a copious supply of water, turning it lush and green. These are, as the mate puts it to the Nāyakī's mother, unmistakable indications of the Nāyakī's love affair with the Lord, which the mother should also take due note of. It is indeed impossible to reclaim the Nāyakī, drowned in the ocean of the Lord's grace.

tiru-aruḷ mūḻki, vaikalum ceḻu nīr-niṟak kaṇṇa-pirāṉ
tiru-aruḷkaḷum cērntamaikku aṭaiyāḷam tirunta uḷa;
tiru-aruḷ aruḷāl avaṉ ceṉṟu cēr taṉ tiruppuliyūr
tiru-aruḷ kamuku oṇ paḻattatu-melliyal cevvitaḻē. (VIII–9–6)

Translation

This lady's lips are glowing red like the arecanut fruit,
Which by the Lord's grace thrives in cool Tiruppuliyūr, His favourite resort;
This is a sure sign indeed that she remains immersed for ever
In the sweet grace of Kaṇṇapirāṉ of oceanic colour.

Note

The arecanut trees in Tiruppuliyūr do not thrive on water but are fed by His grace. If the Nāyakī's lips are also red like the arecanut fruits of that place, it only shows that she is also the recipient of His sweet grace. According to her mate, there are very many indications of her revelling in His grace, since long. Her reddened lips, with a special glow, not so pronounced before, the aftermath of her union with the Lord, put the whole matter beyond all doubt.

mel ilaic celva vaṇ koṭip pulka, vīṅku iḷam tāḷ kamukiṉ
mal ilai maṭal vāḻai īṉ kaṉi cūḻntu, maṇam kamaḻntu,
pul ilait teṅkiṉūṭu kāl ulavum taṉ tiruppuliyūr
mallal am celvak kaṇṇaṉ tāḷ aṭaintāḷ-im maṭavaraḷē.
(VIII–9–7)

Translation

It seems this young lady has attained the bounteous feet
Of the Lord in cool Tiruppuliyūr where plays the southerly breeze
Amid cocoanut groves and ripe bunches of plantains waft fragrance sweet
And lovely betel creepers nestle the mature, sturdy arecanut trees.

Note

"Even the inanimate things of Tiruppuliyūr live in close amity, moving hand in gloves; in such a glorious setting, the Nāyakī would appear to have mingled with the presiding Deity of the place and got on very well with Him," says the mate unto the elders.

maṭavaraḷ aṉṉaimīrkaṭku eṉ collic collukēṉ?-mallaic celva
vaṭamoḻi maṟaivāṇar vēḷviyuḷ ney aḷal vāṉ pukai pōy
tiṭa vicumpil amarar nāṭṭai maṟaikkum taṉ tiruppuliyūr
paṭa aravu-aṇaiyāṉ taṉ nāmam allāl, paravāḷ ivaḷē.
(VIII–9–8)

Translation

What shall I tell you, elders, about the felicity of this damsel?
She utters not anything but the holy names of the Lord,
Who does on hooded serpent recline in Tiruppuliyūr cool,
Whence the fumes of the ritualistic fire lit by Vedic scholars grand,
Fed by ghee, right up to the sky, ascend
And envelop the home of the celestials in the region beyond.

Notes

(i) "The Nāyakī would appear to have been attracted by the vedic rites and rituals, in full swing, in Tiruppuliyūr and gone in union with the presiding Deity of the place." says the mate. The mate is not in a position to say anything more about the Nāyakī. Could it be said that the Nāyakī was subservient to her mate or that the mate was also a party to the excesses committed by the Nāyakī or that the Nāyakī defied her mate and got out of hand? No, none of these and the mate could do nothing better than writhing her hands disconcertingly. It is indeed surprising that the Nāyakī should describe, without any reserve, the very bed she shared with her Lord, overlooking the fact that her mate was standing beside.

(ii) It is noteworthy that the Āḻvār, who is the author of the Tamil vedas, got attracted by the rituals performed according to the Sanskrit Vedas. These rituals of the Sanskrit Vedas propitiate the Lord, in His 'Antaryāmi' aspect, residing in all things and beings as the Internal Controller but not visible to the naked eye. The

hymns of the Tamil vedas aim at service unto the Lord, in His 'Arca' or worshippable Form, being sung in front of Him, to His great delectation.

paravāḷ ivaḷ ninṟu, irāppakal-paṉi nīr niṟak kaṇṇa-pirāṉ
viravu ār icai maṟai vētiyar oli vēlaiyiṉ ninṟu olippa,
karavu ār taṭamtoṟum tāmaraik kayam tīvikai ninṟu alarum
puravu ār kaḷaṉikaḷ cūḻ tiruppuliyūrp pukaḻ anṟi, maṟṟē.
(VIII–9–9)

Translation

This young lady sings, day and night, nothing but the glory
Of Tiruppuliyūr where bloom bright lotus flowers in sweet array,
In huge ponds with crocodiles infested and the chantings sweet
Of the vedic brahmins, like unto the roaring of the sea, reverberate,
The cloud-hued Lord Kaṇṇapiāṉ's favourite seat,
Surrounded by fields many of fertility great.

Note

The Nāyakī speaks of nothing but Tiruppuliyūr, the exquisite form of the Lord ens' rined there, the vedic chantings of the devotees over there and the lush fields and luscious fruits in plentiful supply. The mate avers that this clearly points to the Nāyakī's involvement with the Deity over there.

anṟi, maṟṟōr upāyam eṉ, ivaḷ amtaṇ tuḷāy kamaḻtal—
kuṉṟa mā maṇi māṭa maḷikaik kōlak kuḻāṅkaḷ malki,
teṉ ticait tilatam purai kuṭṭanāṭṭut tiruppuliyūr
niṉṟa māyaṉ pirāṉ tiruvaruḷām ivaḷ nērpaṭṭate ? (VIII–9–10)

Translation

The aroma of tuḷaci, cool and nice, on this lady reveals
Her contact gracious with the wondrous Lord in that crest jewel
Of southerly direction, Tiruppuliyūr, where stand castles tall
In cluster grand; what other reason can I, for this, tell?

Note

The mate now adduces yet another evidence which conclusively establishes the fact of the Nāyakī's contact with the Lord at Tiruppuliyūr. The fragrance of tuḷaci, the Nāyakī's person exudes, is the tell-tale, betraying her contact with the Lord, who wears the aromatic tuḷaci garland on His crown, chest and shoulders. " Could there at all be any other reason for this special aroma on the Nāyakī's person? ", the Mate emphatically asks.

nērpaṭṭa niṟai mūvulakukkum nāyakaṉ-Taṉ aṭimai
nērpaṭṭa toṇṭar toṇṭar toṇṭar toṇṭaṉ caṭakōpaṉ col
nērpaṭṭa tamiḻ-mālai āyirattuḷ ivai pattum
nērpaṭṭār-avar nērpaṭṭār-neṭumārku aṭimai ceyyavē.
(VIII–9–11)

Translation

Those that are well-versed in these songs ten
Out of the choice thousand composed by Caṭakōpaṉ,
The vassal of the vassal of the Sovereign Master's vassals' vassal,
Will for His loving service become truly eligible.

Notes

(i) The chanters of this decad are assured of the attainment of the final goal, namely, eternal service unto the Lord. The Āḻvār describes himself as the vassal unto him that stands last in the long chain of the Lord's devotees, steepep in His loving service. Evidently, this sets the pace for the decad, that immediately follows, highlighting service unto the Lords' devotees as the highest goal.

(ii) It has to be noted that this song refers to the Lord, the Sovereign Master of the entire universe, the essential nature of the individual soul as the humblest servant of the devout, the excellence and potentiality of the hymnal expounding the Lord's greatness and the ultimate benefit devolving on the chanters of this decad.

Eighth Centum—Tenth Decad (VIII-10)
(Neṭumāṟku aṭimai)

Preamble

The subject's exclusive dependence on the Supreme Lord was emphasised in the last decad. But then, dependence on the Lord could extend upto the Lord's devotees as well by virtue of His unbounded love for them. This is like our wearing on our heads, the holy sandals of the Lord and swallowing the water obtained by giving them a sacramental bath. Did not Tirumaṅkai Āḻvār declare in VIII-10-3 of his 'Periya Tirumoḻi' that, as a result of learning the eight-syllabled Tirumantra, he became a vassal of the devotees of the Lord, enshrined in Tirukkaṇṇapuram? Service unto the Lord's devotees, the logical culmination of service to the Lord (which is implied in the word 'namaḥ', occurring in Tirumantra), is dealt with, in this decad. Actually, the end-song of the last decad has already set the pace for this decad. No doubt, the essential nature of the soul, with special emphasis on servanthood (śeṣatva), as the Lord's vassal, extending upto the Lord's devotees, was set out, as far back as III-7 'Payilum Cuṭaroḻi'. We, however, see in this decad, the Āḻvār intensely longing for the fulfilment of such service, constituting the final goal. Being the liege unto the Lord's favourite apostles and Saints on Earth is deemd to be a greater virtue, carrying to greater value than direct allegiance to the Lord Himself. In 'Īṭu', mention has been made of an anecdote, shedding copious light on this topic. Ammuṉi Āḻvāṉ, a disciple of Sri Parāśara Bhaṭṭar was greeted, as follows, by the illustrious master, on the former's return to Srirangam from his sojourn in the Hoysala country (Mysore):

"Son, we learn with great pleasure about the service you have rendered, during your sojourn in those parts, to the Śrī Vaiṣṇavas, over there. In keeping with your spirit of service unto the Lord's devotees, you richly deserve a discourse from me on 'Neṭumāṟkaṭimai', the decad of Tiruvāymoḻi, bearing on this very aspect."

The Āḻvār ends up this decad by praying unto the Lord, that this passionate longing of his to serve the Lord's devotees should endure till the end of time and it should also be instilled in all those associated with him, generation after generation.

neṭumāṟku aṭimai ceyvēṉpōl avaṉaik karuta,vañcittu,
taṭumāṟṟu aṟṟa tīkkatikaḷ muṟṟum tavirnta; catir niṉaintāl,
koṭu mā viṉaiyēṉ avaṉ aṭiyār aṭiyē kūṭumitu allāl,
viṭumāṟu eṉpatu eṉ, antō!-viyaṉ mūvulaku peṟiṉumē?
(VIII-10-1)

Translation

If even the mere thought of simulating service unto the Lord,
Who for His devotees bears love immense, could truly rid
Me of all my cruel sins, unknown to me, can this sinner great
Give up service unto His devotees, at their lovely feet?
Need I say, except this, I would reject outright all else
Be it even a gift unto me of all the worlds immense?

Note

If the mere wish of the Āḻvār, with hardly any semblance of sincerity to serve the Lord, could surely blot out all his deadly sins, that very moment, without his being aware of the whole process how much more beneficial could whole-hearted devotion to His apostles be? This is how the Āḻvār revolved, in his mind, seeing that the Lord bears inordinate love for His devotees and service unto His devotees would, therefore surely please Him much more than direct service unto Him. If the Āḻvār were to choose between service unto the Lord's devotees on the one hand, and possession of the combined wealth of all the three worlds devolving on him as an unconditional gift on the other, he would not set his eye on the latter but firmly stick to the former; the latter stands no comparison whatever with the former.

viyaṉ mūvulaku peṟiṉum, pōytāṉē tāṉē āṉālum,
puyal mēkampōl tirumēṉi ammāṉ puṉai pūm kaḻal aṭikkīḻe
cayamē aṭimai talainiṉṟār tiruttāḷ vaṇaṅki, immaiyē
payaṉē iṉpam yāṉ peṟṟatu uṟumō-pāviyēṉukkē ? (VIII-10-2)

Translation

Neither sovereignty over the sprawling worlds three
Nor enjoyment of one's self, freed from bondage, can equal the bliss,
This sinner has attained, of adoring the feet lovely

Of the self-less devotees in the vanguard of service
Unto the cloud-hued Lord bedecked with lovely flowers and anklet victorious.

Notes

(i) Even the combined gift of vast wealth and the 'Kaivalya' state of perennial freedom from bodily ties, cannot equalise the bliss of service at the holy feet of the self-less apostles of the Lord, His hot favourites.

(ii) The self-enjoyment, referred to, in the second line, is the 'Kaivalya' state, denoted by the phrase in the first line of the original text of this song, "self becoming self". The self in family bondage, cannot enjoy itself, having to be in the midst of the family members, sharing their weal and woe. If it attained Heaven and partook of the bliss of eternal service unto the Lord, it has to be in the company of the glorious attendants over there and once again, there is no scope for solitary enjoyment of one's own self. And so, the phrase in question could denote only the 'Kaivalya' experience or enjoyment of itself by the emancipated soul, in disembodied state. Although this is an eternal state, the Āḻvār would not regard it as the ultimate value (Puruṣārta) worth coveting, rather, he shuns it all along.

uṟumō pāviyēṉukku-iv ulakam mūṉṟum uṭaṉ niṟaiya
ciṟu mā mēṉi nimirtta eṉ centāmaraikkaṇ tirukkuṟaḷaṉ
naṟu mā virai nāḷ-malar aṭikkiḻp pukutal; aṉri, avaṉ aṭiyār,
ciṟu mā maṉicarāy eṉṉai āṇṭār, iṅkē tiriyavē ? (VIII–10–3)

Translation

Would it be appropriate if I did attain
The lotus feet, of fragrance sweet, of the lotus-eyed Lord,
Who did His midget form expand and pervade
The worlds three, all at once, seeing that there remain
In this abode, His devotees great, the '*little-big*' men,

Who did redeem me, and my mind I can't turn
On anything but unremitting service unto them?

Notes

(i) Having abjured wealth and 'Kaivalya Mokṣa' in the two preceding songs, the Āḻvār now asserts that even service unto the Supreme Lord has to be given the go-by, overwhelmed, as he is, by service unto the '*little-big*' men (as in the original text), over here, which is virtually an enlargement of service unto God. The 'little-big men', an apparent contradiction in terms, refers to the great apostles of profound knowledge but with frail bodies, who move about, in this harrowing world, and propagate the gospel of God-love. Here is an interesting anecdote, in elucidation of this extra-ordinary phrase. When Kūratāḻvāṉ was reciting this stanza within the hearing of his son Parāśara Bhaṭṭar, the latter, a mere boy, was curious to know how the diametrically opposite qualities of littleness and bigness could inhere in one and the same individual. When the young lad sought of his erudite father, clarification in this regard, the latter appreciated the query but expressed his inability to illustrate the position in the light of the Vedic truths, which could not be inculcated in the boy, at that stage, when he had not yet had the spiritual initiation through 'upanayana', the sacred investiture ceremony. The learned father, however, found it handy to bring home to the boy the import of the expression in question through concrete examples of the great devotees, profound scholars like Ciriyāccāṉ, Mutaliyāṇṭāṉ, Empār Aruḷāḷapperumāḷ Emperumāṉār etc., possessing frail bodies.

(ii) It might be recalled that the Āḻvār was earlier under the irresistible spell cast by the enthralling beauty of Lord Vāmanā but now he switches on to the service of the devotees subjugated by Vāmana's exquisite charm.

iṅkē tirintēṟku iḻukku uṟṟu eṉ-iru mā nilam muṉ uṇṭu, umiḻnta,
ceṅkōlatta pavaḷavāyc centāmaraikkaṇ eṉ ammāṉ
poṅku ēḻ pukaḻkaḷ vāya āy, pulaṉkoḷ vaṭivu eṉ maṉattatu āy,
aṅkuēy malarkaḷ kaiya āy, vaḻipaṭṭu ōṭa, aruḷilē? (VIII–10–4)

Translation

What would be wrong indeed, if I abjured heaven
And stayed on, in this abode, my tongue spelt out
The radiant glory of the lotus-eyed Lord with lovely lips, who gulped down
All the worlds once and then spat them out,
I did in my heart implant His form exquisite
And my hands worshipped Him with choice flowers,
In the foot-steps of His devotees of great fervour?

Note

It is but meet that the 'carama parva niṣṭā', that is, one who adores the Lord's devotees much to the delight of the Lord, should adore Him also for the gratification of the devotees. Matura Kavi Āḻvār, who knew no God other than Parāṅkuśa (Nammāḻvār), said, in the third stanza of 'Kaṇṇiṇuṇ Ciṟuttāmpu,', that there was nothing wrong in his adoring the cloud-hued Lord, for the delectation of Nammāḻvār, His staunch devotee. That song of his would appear to have been inspired only by this song of his master. The Āḻvār's tongue, which should sing the glory of the Lord's devotees, now sings His praise; his mind, where the devotees are to be enshrined, now holds the Lord and his hands which should offer flowers at the feet of the great apostles of the Lord, now place those flowers at His lovely feet. This does not, however, constitute any deviation from his arowed stance of being the vassal of His devotees (Bhāgavata seṣatva). Verily, it is but an extension of that, directed towards the pleasure of those devotees themselves, c.f. Śatrugna's devotion to Śrī Rāma, as but a corollary to the former's devotion to Bharata, by-on-means detracting from it. See also the elucidation in aphorism 127 of 'Ācārya Hrudayam'.

vaḻipaṭṭu ōṭa, aruḷ peṟṟu, māyaṉ kōla malar aṭikkiḻc
cuḻipaṭṭu ōṭum cuṭarccōti veḷḷattu iṉpuṟṟu iruntālum,
iḻipaṭṭu ōṭum uṭaliṉil piṟantu, taṉ cīr yāṉ kaṟṟu,
moḻipaṭṭu ōṭum kaviamutam nukarcci uṟumō-muḻutumē?
(VIII–10–5)

Translation

Were I blest by the wondrous Lord to render service eternal
At His lotus feet lovely, in the yonder land supernal,
With its whirling splendour in spate and rejoice, would it at all equal
The rapturous rapport with the devout,
Singing in their holy company, the songs nectarean that sprout,
From the sweet contemplation of the Lord's qualities great,
Albeit possession of the meanest of bodies is my lot?

Note

The Āḻvār is gradually working up the unique bliss of service unto the Lord's apostles and Saints and holding a rapport with them, before which even the bliss of eternal service in the yonder Heaven, resplendent with the stream of whirling radiance at the lotus feet of the Lord of transcendent glory, pales into insignificance. In the earlier songs, possession of the wealth of all the three worlds and self-enjoyment in a disembodied state after final emancipation from bodily bondage, have been discarded as insignificant nothing, in comparison with the glory of service unto the Lord's devotees. The Āḻvār does not mind acquiring the meanest of bodies if that would not hamper the joy of his experiencing the Lord's glory and transmitting it in the form of sweet songs to be sung in the company of the holy men over here. Feeding the devotees with such songs, providing real nourishment to them, is an important facet of service unto the devotees. It is, therefore, very appropriate that this aspect finds mention in this decad.

nukarcci uṟumō mūvulakiṉ vīṭu pēṟu-taṉ kēḻ il
pukarc cem mukatta kaḷiṟu aṭṭa poṉ āḻikkai eṉ ammāṉ,
nikarc cem paṅki eri viḻikaḷ nīṇṭa acurar uyir ellām
takarttu, uṇṭu, uḻalum puḷ-pākaṉ, periya taṉi māp pukaḻē?
(VIII–10–6)

Translation

Will the prowess great, astounding cosmic wealth and sovereignty
Of the Lord, my Sire, sporting the ring lovely
And flying (Garuḍa) the bird, smart and lively,
Who slew the majestic elephant peerless, red with rage,
And did the red-haired Asuras hefty, with fiery eyes, flay,
Stand any comparison with the supreme bliss
Of contemplation of the vast array of His attributes peerless?

Note

This song is but a follow-up of the immediately preceding song, amplifying the idea conveyed therein. The bliss of contemplation of the Lord's peerless glory, finding expression through such scientillating hymns, is indeed an experience so great that, before it, even the Lord's own happiness resulting from His Sovereignty and might, cosmic wealth etc., pales into insignificance.

taṉi māp pukaḻē eññāṉṟum niṟkum paṭiyāt tāṉ tōṉṟi,
muṉi māp pirama mutal-vittāy, ulakam mūṉṟum muḻaippitta
taṉi māt teyvat taḷir aṭikkīḻp pukutal aṉṟi, avaṉ aṭiyār
naṉi māk kalavi iṉpamē nāḷum vāykka-naṅkaṭkē.(VIII–10–7)

Translation

May we the supreme bliss of communion enjoy, for ever,
With the devout, setting aside even the rapport with the Lord Supreme,
Of peerless glory, the first cause of one and all, Who did usher
By a mere resolve, all the worlds of incomparable fame,
That shall, true to vedic dictum, endure the test of time!

Notes

(i) Here is a case of the Āḻvār wanting to reach the farthest limit of God-enjoyment, culminating in rapturous rapport with His devotees (these virtually taking the place of God) and abiding in it, for all time.

(ii) The Lord's peerless glory referred to here, is His extraordinary grace in thinking of resuscitation of the Universe, lying dormant in a subtle state, without distinction of name and form and putting it back on its feet, Himself being the triple cause (material, operative and instrumental) for such an evolution. The chief merit of this creation is the opportunity it provides unto the creatures to exhibit their gratitude unto their Creator, the great Benefactor, by seeking His lotus feet, as their sole refuge. In the present context, the Āḻvār's ultimate goal, however, extends up to the devout who thus seek refuge at the Lord's lovely feet and it is the incessant communion with these Vaiṣṇavas (Lord's ardent devotees) that the Āḻvār avidly longs for.

nāḷum vāykka naṅkaṭku-naḷir nīrk kaṭalaip paṭaittu, taṉ
tāḷum, tōḷum, mutikaḷum, camaṉ ilāta pala parappi,
nīḷum paṭar pūṅ kaṟpakak kāvum, niṟai pal nāyiṟṟiṉ
kōḷum, uṭaiya maṇi malaipōl kiṭantāṉ tamarkaḷ kūṭṭamē.
(VIII–10–8)

Translation

May we for ever behold the assembly grand, of the apostles great,
Of the Lord, who lay on the cool oceanic waters He did create,
With outstretched feet, shoulders and crowns, many and matchless,
Like unto an emerald mount, abounding in crawling orchids
And gardens fine, beaming with the radiance of Suns in myriads.

Note

Nothing more is needed, the Āḻvār now says, than even the mere sight of the grand congregation of the Lord's self-less devotees, steeped in the enjoyment of His enchanting Form, as described herein. Creating, first of all, the vast expanse of water, the Lord lay on it with perfect ease, stretching out His numerous feet, shoulders and crowns, like unto an emerald mount abounding in lovely orchards in repose.

tamarkaḷ kūṭṭa valviṉaiyai nācam ceyyum catu mūrtti,
amar koḷ āli, caṅku, vāḷ, vil, taṇṭu āti pal paṭaiyaṉ,
kumaraṉ, kōla aiṅkaṇai vēḷ tātai, kōtu il aṭiyār-tam
tamarkaḷ tamarkaḷ tamarkaḷām catirē vāykka–tamiyēṟkē.

(VIII–10–9)

Translation

May this vassal, left alone amidst the worldlings, be blest
With the bliss of service unto the vassal, who stands last
In the grand chain of the blemishless devotees of the Lord,
Who did unto Manmata, perennial youth and exquisite charm impart,
Who the militant weapons, conch, discus, sword, bow etcetera does wield
And, with His might unique, rids the enemies tough of His holy band.

Notes

(i) The Lord destroys *en masse* the entire band of those tough enemies of His devotees. It could also mean destruction of the obstacles confronting the band of devotees as a group or the destruction of the cluster of evils, as and when they crop up.

(ii) Even the proverbial youth and handsomeness of Manmata, the deity reputed to be a paragon of beauty, are imparted unto him by the Lord, who is 'Manmata Manmata'.

(iii) Three types of devotees have been mentioned in stanzas 2, 9 and 10 of this decad. In the category of those *exemplary devotees to whom service of the Lord is an end in itself*, alluded to in the 2nd stanza, falls Bharata; in the category of *blemishless devotees who are absolutely selfless*, mentioned in this song, is included Śatrugna, while, in the next category of the *inseparable devotees* who can't brook separation from the Lord, Lakṣmaṇa is right in the vanguard. Likewise, he, Āḻvār and his associates stand on a pedestal of their own, well apart from the mad pursuits of the worldlings.

vāykka tamiyēṟku ūḻitōṟu ūḻi ūḻi–mā kāyam—
pūk koḷ mēṉi, nāṉku tōḷ, poṉ āḻik kai, eṉ ammāṉ
nikkam illā aṭiyār–tam aṭiyār aṭiyār aṭiyār em
kōkkaḷ; avarkkē kuṭikaḷāyc cellum nalla kōṭpāṭē.

(VIII–10–10)

Translation

Those that stand last in the chain of the devotees inseparable,
Of the Lord of the lovely tint of lily blue, with shoulders four,
Who wields the discus bright, are unto me, my Masters sure;
May the desire keen to serve them wholly and for ever,
On me devolve and pass on to my clan, as a whole.

Note

The Āḻvār is very keen that such an ardent desire to serve the one that stands last in the long chain of the Lord's ardent devotees, should not stop with him alone but trickle down to those connected with him, generation after generation. The inseparable devotees, referred to, are those like Lakṣmaṇa, who longed to serve Lord Rāma, day and night, without respite, in all possible ways. (See also notes under VIII-10-9).

nalla kōṭpāṭṭu ulakaṅkaḷ mūṉṟiṉuḷḷum tāṉ niṟainta
allik kamalak kaṇṇaṉai am taṉ kurukūrc caṭakōpaṉ
collappaṭṭa āyirattuḷ ivaiyum pattum vallārkaḷ
nalla patattāl maṉai vāḻvar, koṇṭa peṇṭir makkaḷē.

(VIII–10–11)

Translation

Those that are well-versed in these songs ten,
Out of the thousand uttered by Kurukūr Caṭakōpaṉ,
Adoring the Lord with lotus eyes, large and lovely, who pervades
All the three worlds with wholesome creeds,
Will as householders flourish, with fervour great,
To serve unremittingly the Lord's devotees aright.

Notes

(i) The Āḻvār invests all the three worlds with his remarkable fervour to serve the Lord's devotees, which has become,

as it were, a creed with him. This is the wholesome creed with which he invests all the worlds also. As Śrī Nampiḷḷai puts it, the worlds settled down to orderly thinking, good conduct and behaviour, only after the Āḷvār sang this decad (Tiruvāymoḷi).

(ii) Far from getting vexed with the Āḷvār for his by-passing Him and getting into the domain of 'Bhāgavata-śeṣatva' (Service to His devotees), the Lord gazes at him in great wonderment, seeing that he pines for this creed of his to trickle down to his futur generations also. In the process, the Lord's eyes get widened further still, making them even more attractive than before and inviting the Āḷvār to take due note of it and give expression thereto in this end-song.

(iii) The benefit accruing to the chanters of this decad, as set out in this end-song, sounds rather queer. To get consigned to the life of a house-holder would seem like getting into some thing the Āḷvār has been abhorring all along, and detests in the very next decad (IX-I). The point to be emphasised here is, however, the merit attaching to 'Gṛhastāśrama', life as a virtuous householder, ably supported by members having the common objective of serving the devout with unremitting zeal and sincerity, such as that of Kūrathāḷvāṉ, Aṉantāḷvaṉ and other savants. It is only family life which does not conform to this ideal, that needs to be condemned and eschewed. In 'Īṭu' there is, as usual, a juicy anecdote to reinforce the wholesome aspect of family life. The great Ācārya, Śrī Rāmānuja, set out on a pilgrimage to 'Aṉantacayaṉam' (Trivandrum in Kerala State), accompanied by a large number of dis iples. On the way, they halted at the residence of Celva Nampi, an ardent devotee of remarkable excellence, (vide also the 11th stanza of Periyāḷvār's Tiruppallāṇṭu) at Tirukkoṭṭiyūr. Although Nampi was out of station, at that time, his equally devoted wife lavishly entertained Śrī Rāmānuja and his huge entourage, overjoyed at the voluntary arrival of so many 'Bhāgavatas' (devotees), all at once, an act of grace galore on their part. The household granary which was full of paddy, recently harvested, was pounded into rice, *in toto*, with great jubilation and all that rice was consumed by the venerable guests. On Celva Nampi's return home, he found the granary absolutely empty. Without the slightest disquietitude, the perfect hostess, his wife was, she asssured Nampi that their granary in Heaven should indeed be full. Let it be noted that this is the kind of household that has been vouchsafed by the benign Āḷvār to the chanters of this decad.

Toṇṭaṉūr Nampi, Eccāṉ and a few other great savants are also said to have dedicated their lives to the service of the devout (Bhāgavatas).

THE CENTUM, IN RETROSPECT: (DECAD-WISE SUMMARY)

(VIII-1): In the concluding decad of the Seventh Centum, we saw how the Āḷvār was longing for the immense pleasure of singing these hymns (Tiruvāymoḷi) before the Divine Couple at Tiruvāraṉviḷai and rendering unto Them, other kinds of service, as well. But then, the project did not get off the ground and non-fulfilment of his cherished desire made the Āḷvār grow sceptical of the Lord's *bona fides and attributes*, mainly, His traits of loving condescension and ability to concede the wishes of His devotees. And so, we see him giving expression to his misgivings, *in the opening decad of this Centum*. Apprehending, however, that the Āḷvār, sunk in despair, under the delusion that all His auspicious traits have dried up, might collapse altogether, the Lord set at naught his doubts by calling upon him to ponder over all that He had done for him, so far and assuring him of the due fulfilment of whatever He intended to do further for him. Thus consoled, the Āḷvār feels elevated from his erstwhile depression;

(VIII-2): Although the Āḷvār's misgivings were cleared up, in the last decad, he was still not happy because of his inability to achieve the external perception of the Lord's exquisite charm and physical contact, longed for, by him. This gave rise to yet another doubt in his mind, whether the Omniscient Lord still discovered in him traces of worldly desires and was, therefore, holding back. And so, the Āḷvār vindicates, *in the second decad*, his absolute detachment from all things ungodly, fiercely concentrating on the Lord, with no other thought crossing his mind. But then, he does this, not by means of a direct dialogue with the Lord but through argumentation between him, turned as Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī and the mates and elders;

(VIII-3) : The Āḻvār could not lift his mind off the vision of the Lord's exquisite Form of spectacular grandeur, conjured up by him in VIII-2-10 and, therefore, he voices forth *in the third decad* his apprehension of the safety of the Lord who moves about, in all His heavenly splendour, alone and unaided in this wicked world, peopled by the ungodly and the selfish. In the exuberance of his God-love, the Āḻvār loses perspective of the sequence of time; he would like to move about as the Lord's camp-follower, carrying His bows and arrows; he is anxious that the turbulent child, who slept in the cradle under Yaśodhā's nose and is now reposing, as a tender Babe, containing all the worlds in His stomach, on a tender fig-leaf, over the vast expanse of water, with none to attend on Him, should not fall asleep and slip down, into the deep waters; seeing the Lord, in His Iconic manifestation, in a reclining posture in quite a few pilgrim Centres, the Āḻvār thinks that He is relaxing Himself after His strenuous endeavours, such as spanning all the worlds, setting His tender feet over hill and dale, rubbles and brambles etc, and offers to massage His shoulders and feet. Above all, he feels vexed, with his loneliness, not finding yet another, in the whole world, sharing his anxiety in this regard. Towards the end of the decad, we find that the Lord has set the Āḻvār at ease, by convincing him that there was hardly any room for such fears and made him regain his composure, cured of his erstwhile fears;

(VIII-4) : Apprehending that the Āḻvār might, in the exuberance of his God-love, once again entertain fears similar to those voiced forth by him, in the third decad, the Lord wanted to dispel the Āḻvār's fears, with no chance whatever of their revival. He, therefore, revealed to the Āḻvār, His invulnerable abode in Tirucceṅkuṉṟūr Tiruccirṟāṟu (Kerala State), out of bounds to the ungodly, attended by the mighty band of three thousand Vedic scholars, full of devotion. As a further precaution, the Lord also exhibited to the Āḻvār, His wondrous deeds, revealing His extra-ordinary prowess and valour. With his fears thus totally eradicated, the Āḻvār could whole-heartedly enjoy *in the fourth decad* the Lord's exquisite beauty;

(VIII-5) : The intense mental enjoyment of the Lord's regal Form, enchanting, every inch, resorted to, by the Āḻvār, in the seventh song of the fourth decad, once again resulted in a deep yearning, an insatiable longing for external perception of the Lord's Form, as envisioned by him and getting locked in His sweet embrace. Non-fulfilment of his longing has consigned the Āḻvār to the bottom-most depths of dejection, the like of which has not been witnessed, in the earlier decads. He cried out his misery, *in the fifth decad*, like unto one bodily trapped in a forest fire and his limbs appear to be even more worn out than their owner. The Saint beckons the Lord to appear before him, in all His splendour, wearing His crown, tall and majestic and moving along, like the exhilarating rain-cloud, the rising Sun, so on and so forth. The Lord did not, however, respond and so, this decad ends on a despondent note, the Āḻvār being led to believe that he would pass away, immured in grief;

(VIII-6) : Stung by a deep sense of remorse over His laxity in not responding to the Āḻvār's invitation, the Lord pondered over the steps to be taken by Him to placate the Āḻvār. But then, if He straightaway presented Himself

before the Āḻvār, in his present state of mind, he would just collapse due to excessive joy. It was, therefore, expedient that the Āḻvār's enjoyment of the Lord should be induced by stages, so as to be stable, without anything untoward happening. The Lord, therefore, stationed Himself in Tirukkaṭittāṉam (a pilgrim centre in Kerala State), so as to enable the Āḻvār to go over there and mingle with Him freely. The Āḻvār, who got scent of it, felt elated over the Lord's overwhelming love for him and gave vent to his resultant joy *in the sixth decad*;

(VIII-7) : The Lord's desire to get at the subject, His coveted belonging, is very much more than that of the Āḻvār to get hold of Him. The Lord, therefore, mingles with the Āḻvār, with such an inordinate longing that the Āḻvār realises, with a stinging sense of shame, that he had tried to reverse the role, by begging of the Lord for his redemption, overlooking the fact that it was the Lord who was all along the supplicant for the Āḻvār's love unto Him. It is an exceedingly grateful Āḻvār that acknowledges *in the seventh decad*, with great feeling, the enormous love bestowed by the Lord on the individual soul, as the indefatigable cultivator of God-love, in the latter. The bliss enjoyed by the Āḻvār, in this context, stands on a pedestal of its own and it can even be asserted that there is no comparable decad in the entire hymnal ;

(VIII-8) : No doubt, the Āḻvār gave vent to his great jubilation, in the seventh decad and even so, in the eighth song of that decad, he referred to himself as a frail being with whom the great Lord of unlimited prowess has chosen to mingle freely and stay on. The Lord noticed, with great concern, the revival of the earlier tendency of the Āḻvār to shrink back from Him, with a frightful sense of his own pettiness, in contra-distinction to the Lord's grandeur of unlimited dimensions. Therefore, He wanted to quell the Āḻvār's notion of the Soul's pettiness by revealing to him its real grandeur. But then, the soul, like unto a mere fire-fly, may not hold out any appeal to the Āḻvār, profoundly struck by the Lord's exquisite charm. The Lord, therefore, revealed to the Āḻvār, His charm first, and then, the grandeur of the Āḻvār's soul, in its relation of liegeship to the Sovereign Lord, as delectable unto Him as His ornaments. And so, *in the eighth decad*, the Āḻvār dwells on the intrinsic beauty of the soul, as the exclusive vassal of the Lord, as revealed by the Lord Himself;

(VIII-9) : Seeing that Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī (Āḻvār) has come off marriageable age, the parents make known to the folks, in the town, their intention to get her married to an eligible bachelor. The Nāyakī is, however, fiercely steeped in the Supreme Lord and, as a matter of fact, she has already had secret contacts with the Lord, enshrined in Kuṭṭanāṭṭu Tiruppuliyūr (Kerala State), of which her parents were not aware. The mate, who enjoys the Nāyakī's confidence, however, knew about it from her speech and comportment but she was afraid of inviting the wrath of the elders, if she publicised the truth about the Nāyakī. At the same time, she did not want that the elders should go ahead, with their plans and so, as a *via-media*, the mate makes it appear that she has just got to know about the Nāyakī's affair with the Lord, at the aforesaid pilgrim centre. The mate further impresses upon the elders that,

in view of this development, it would no longer be feasible for them to pursue their former plans. This brings to the fore, the Nāyakī's inalienability from the Lord to whom she stands solely dedicated, as the object of His exclusive enjoyment. Thus the essential nature of the soul, as set out in the eighth decad, gets crystallised still further, *in the ninth decad.*

(This is the last of the three decads, in the entire hymnal, put in the mouth of Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī's mate, the earlier ones being IV-6 and VI-5).

(VIII-10) : The subject's exclusive dependence on the Supreme Lord was emphasised in the preceding decad. And now, service unto the Lord's devotees, the logical culmination of service to the Lord, is dealt with, *in the concluding Centum of this decad.* No doubt, the essential nature of the soul, with special emphasis on the concept of servanthood (Śeṣatva), as the Lord's vassal, extending up to His devotees, was already set out in III-7 (Payilum Cuṭaroḷi). We, however, see, in this decad, the Āḻvār intensely longing for the fulfilment of such service, constituting the final goal. Being the liege, unto the Lord's favourite apostles and Saints on Earth, is deemed to be a greater virtue, carrying a greater value than direct allegiance to the Lord Himself.

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ERRATA (Vol. III)

Page	Line	
515	5	Insert , after 'saw', Centum' and 'onwards'.
,,	8	Insert , after 'which'.
,,	13	*For* Alvar *read as* Āḻvār.
,,	16	Insert , after 'do'.
,,	18	*For* tran- *read as* trans-.
516	7	(From bottom) substitute ' for !
517	9	*For* muḷaṅkum *read as* muḷaṅkum.
521	3	*For* ins parable *read as* inseparable.
,,	15	Insert , after 'beneficiary'.
523	18	*For* Caṭakōpaū *read as* Caṭakōpaṉ.
524	12	(From bottom) delete 'of'.
531	9	*For* handfull *read as* handful.
532	23	*For* Em ār *read as* Empār.
534	12	(From bottom) insert , after 'grand'.
537	8	Delete 'the' before 'Lord'
539	4	(From bottom) delete, before 'Ye'.
540	3	*For* 'are one-' *read as* 'any one'.
,,	12	*For* him *read as* Him.
542	9	Insert — after 'praise'.
543	12	*For* Devas *read as* Devas'.
,,	12	(From bottom) *For* of *read as* to.
547	18	*For* Recountingt he *read as* Recounting the
565	8	*For* Porumal *read as* Porunal.
569	2	(From bottom) insert , before 'with'.
576	4	*For* dōtura *read as* dātura.
577	13	*For* enquiries *read as* enquires.
581	11	*For* aprt *read as* apart.
583	2	(From bottom) *For* ulakkaṅkaḷ *read as* ulakaṅkaḷ.
584	19	*For* Āḻvrā *read as* Āḻvār.
610	13	*For* a *read as* as.
613	17	(From bottom) *For* Ṛshis *read as* Ṛṣis.
619	12	(From bottom) delete, after 'then'.
,,	11	(From bottom) *For* flocking *read as* knocking.
620	14	Delete ;
622	3	(From bottom) insert , after 'conceit'.
630	6	Delete , before 'are'.
634	2	*For* Son *read as* on.
,,	5	*For* literarally *read as* literally.
635	2	Delete ?
,,	15	Delete , after 'all'.
636	5	Insert '' after 'Sanctifier'.
638	15	(From bottom) insert 'in' after 'being'.

BOOK IX

Ninth Centum–First Decad (IX-1)
(Koṇṭa peṇṭir)

Preamble

In the last decad (VIII-10), the Āḷvār had revealed to us the quintessence of his creed, namely, looking upon the Lord's devotees as his 'Be-all' and 'End-all', 'All-in-one', the sole means for attaining 'Mokṣa' (Salvation). The Saint is further elaborating it, in this decad, in a manner highly delectable to the devotees, in whom he has taken refuge. The superficial reader might think that this decad strikes a note different from that of the immediately preceding decad inasmuch as the Āḷvār now looks upon the Lord as the aggregate of all conceivable kinship, one can claim. There is, however, no incompatibility between these two decads, the current one being but an elaboration of the theme, set out in the last decad. Even as 'Bhagavad śeṣatva', that is, service unto the Lord culminates in 'Bhāgavata śeṣatva', that is, service unto His devotees, the latter, in its natural sequence, steps into the domain of the former. It is indeed a matter of common knowledge that our love to a specified individual extends up to all those intimately connected with him or her. Likewise, love unto the godly men is automatically carried over to all those closely associated with them and the love so generated reverts to the Lord, as the one loved and revered by the devotees. In Śloka 51 of 'Śrīguṇaratna Kośam' of Sri Parāśara Bhaṭṭar, the illustrious author declares his love unto Lord Raṅganātha, as one stemming from his being the Spouse of Goddess Śrī Raṅga Nāyakī (Śrī Mahalakṣmī). And then, reciprocally, the Upaniṣad reveals its predilection for the Divine Mother, in view of Her being the Consort of the Supreme Lord, the great Ordainer of the universe—' Asyeśānā Jagato Viṣṇupatnī '? Surely, there is no contradiction between these two versions, as they are mutually inclusive and not exclusive.

This decad copiously illustrates, in a telling manner, the utter futility of our hanging on to the earthly relations and all else except the Supreme Lord. Who alone is our Eternal Saviour and Sole Sustainer, under all circumstances. The miserable hollowness of the ephemeral bonds of the earthly relations and associates,

the veritable parasites, is exposed in all its nakedness. Actually, this is but an elaboration of what the Āḻvār had already stated in V-1-8, wherein he pointed out that the Lord is the sum-total of all the happiness derived by the worldly men through glittering wealth, dazzling damsels, dutiful sons, doting parents and so on. It is this decad that set the pace for the great Piḷḷai Lokācāryā's theme that none but the Lord is our Protector, set out in aphorism 39 of Mumukṣuppaḍi and further elaborated by him, in his esoteric treatise, known as 'Prapanna Paṟtrāṇam'.

This decad is deemed to be in benedictive adoration of Mathurā, in Uttara Pradesh, in view of the frequent reference, in this decad, to that holy centre.

koṇṭa peṇṭir, makkaḷ, uṟṟār, cuṟṟattavar, piṟarum
kaṇṭatōṭu paṭṭatu allāl, kātal maṟṟu yātum illai;
eṇ ticaiyum kīḻum, mēlum, muṟṟavum uṇṭa pirāṉ
toṇṭarōmāy uyyal allāl, illai kaṇṭīr-tuṇaiyē (IX–1–1)

Translation

Neither the wife by you acquired nor the sons unto you born
Nor your other relations and friends shall for you entertain
Love other than that rooted in lucre; lies indeed your salvation
In being the vassal of the Benefactor great, Who gulped down
Things, one and all, that lay in all the ten directions.

Notes

(i) Addressing the men of this world, the Saint impresses upon them that they need hardly deceive themselves by lavishing their misplaced affections on the earthly relations, who are not of real consequence and that they will do well to lean, instead, on the Supreme Lord, in view of the inviolable, eternal bond between them and Him. The Āḻvār does not mince matters and points out that one's wife and children are but goods purchased. So much of the man's heart twines round these goods that he would not mind turning his aged parents out, into the streets, in beggar's rags.

Regarding the acquisition of a wife, the following story, related by an eminent discourser, is indeed very interesting and instructive :

A brahmin youth ran about here and there, begging for money with which he could buy a wife. In the course of his wanderings, he reached a big city, where, unfortunately, he fell seriously ill. He had, no doubt, collected a few hundreds of rupees which served to boost up his hopes of soon getting a lady to his side. But the sickness gained ground and the poor fellow was on his death-bed, writhing in agony. When the sympathetic neighbours gathered round him and enquired of him what ailed him, he cried out: "What a pity! I have not been blessed with a beautiful young woman, draped in finery, standing by my pillow and cooling my burning brow with her sweet tears, at this dying moment."

(ii) That the Lord is our Eternal Relation and unfailing Protector is brought out by the manner in which He sustained, unasked and unsolicited, all things and beings, in His stomach, during the Deluge, so that they may not be swept off by the terrific waters. Our salvation, sure and certain, therefore, lies in the recognition of our essential nature, namely, being at the sole disposal of the Supreme Lord, as His exclusive vassal.

tuṇaiyum cārvum ākuvārpōl, cuṟṟattavar piṟarum
aṇaiya vanta ākkam uṇṭēl, aṭṭaikaḷpōl cuvaippar;
kaṇai oṉṟālē ēḻ maramum eyta em kār mukilaip
puṇai eṉṟu uyyap pōkal allāl, illai kaṇṭīr-poruḷē. (IX–1–2)

Translation

The earthly kinsmen and others are after your money and yet pretend
To be your benefactors, safe and sincere, and you they befriend
Only to suck you out like leeches as long as they choose;
Better take refuge in our cloud-hued Lord, Who did pierce

With but a single shaft the trees seven; 'tis no use,
Take note, pinning your faith on others.

Notes

(i) (The earthly relations flock, in strength, to those enjoying wealth and opulence, just to grab whatever they can. These are veritable parasites, putting on the garb of well-wishers and benefactors and are least dependable. On the other hand, the Lord succours even those who are sceptical and entertain doubts about His strength and dispensation. Sugriva's attitude towards Lord Rāma, even after He had promised to relieve the distress of the former by slaying Vali, the powerful monkey king, is the pointer. Sugriva's doubts about Śrī Rāma's ability to vanquish the formidable Vāli were dispelled only after He ably demonstrated His strength and skill by (1) Kicking off, to an enormous distance, the skeleton of Dundubi, the Rākṣasa, slain by Vāli, after a long and grim struggle and (2) sending a powerful shaft which pierced the Seven *Sāl* trees and the seven worlds beyond and ultimately returned to the Lord's quiver, as proof-positive of His enormous strength, more than a match indeed for Vāli, despite the latter's colossal strength. It should also be noted that the Lord seeks nothing in return, like unto the benevolent rain-clouds unleashing water all over. Therefore it is, He is referred to here, as the cloud-hued.

(ii) Again, look at the multifarious ways in which Lord Kṛṣṇa stood beside the Paṇḍavas and Droupati, through thick and thin and protected them at every turn. The lesson to be learnt, from all these, is that the Lord is our sole support and leaning on Him is always productive of immense good while dependence on others can only breed miseries.

poruḷ kai uṇṭāyc cellakkāṇil, pōṟṟi eṉṟu ēṟṟu eḻuvar;
iruḷkoḷ tuṉpattu iṉmai kāṇil, eṉṉē! eṉpārum illai;
maruḷkoḷ ceykai acurar maṅka, vaṭamaturaip piṟantāṟku
aruḷkoḷ āḷāy uyyal allāl, illai kaṇṭīr-araṇē. (IX–1–3)

Translation

When men behold money in your hands, you they hail and court
And secure one thing or the other ere from you they depart;
However, none in pity will unto you come
When chill penury casts on you its terrific gloom;
There's indeed no other way for your salvation
Except the grace of the Lord Who, in North Maturai, was born
To quell the Asuras, who did on all inflict pain.

Notes

(i) The worldly men are essentially selfish and they befriend only those who possess money and lavish praises on them. The latter easily succumb to these sycophants and are misled into believing that they are all genuine well-wishers, with no personal ends in view. The confidence-tricksters will then have no hesitation in fleecing the wealthy men, cheating them, right and left, all the time, and deserting them altogether, once their money is drained off.

(ii) It is with supercilious disdain that the world looks on poverty. Piḷḷai Tirunaraiyūr Araiyar used to relate thus: A man grew rich with the help of a friend who, however, became poor in the process. The latter invited the former for dinner, on a certain occasion. The rich man would not, however, condescend to respond nor even care to enquire of the welfare of the poor man, lest, by doing so, he might (1) suffer in the estimation of the world, as having kinship with a poor man and (2) let the poor man rise in the estimation of the world, as one favoured by a rich friend. In dire contrast to this, the supreme Lord readily responds to the call of the destitute. All that one needs to do is to invoke His redemptive grace and not to shrink away from it, as and when it descends. It is, therefore, no use hankering after lesser persons, for protection; by doing so, one would be asking for trouble, like unt6 the

little babe wanting to touch fire, mistaking it for a red seed (used for weighment of Gold).

araṇam āvar aṟṟa kālaikku eṉṟu eṉṟu amaikkappaṭṭār
iraṇam koṇṭa teppar āvar; iṉṟiyiṭṭāḷum aḵtē;
varuṇittu eṉṉē! vaṭamaturaip piṟantavaṉ vaṇ pukaḻē
caraṇ eṉṟu uyyap pōkal allāl, illai kaṇṭīr-catirē. (IX–1–4)

Translation

The men we court and pamper, after reflection deep,
As our certain saviours, in times of dire need,
Are helpless themselves and will thus betray us indeed;
'Tis no use talking about these ungratefuls, we will do well instead,
To turn our thougpts on the glory great of the One,
In North Maturai born, for our salvation lies therein alone.

Notes

(i) Even those, who are currently well off, apprehend the possibility of lean days overtaking them and, therefore, lean, right from now, on some one in whom they have great confidence. But that very person, looked upon as their prospective saviour and pampered heavily, miserably lets them down, at the crucial moment. In Taittiṟaya Samhita, First Kāṇḍa, fifth praśna, it is said that, in an encounter with the Asuras, the Devas once attained victory. Apprehending, however, the probability of their suffering defeat, in their next encounter with the Asuras, the Devas deposited with 'Agni' (Fire-God) their choicest wealth, as a stand-by, to fall back upon, during those dark days of defeat. The Fire-God, however, appropriated all that wealth unto himself and deserted them. Actually, those persons who are chosen as our prospective guardians and unto whom we entrust all our precious hoardings, knock them off, as if it was but a repayment of the debt we owed them earlier. Even assuming that the person, in whom we pin such a robust faith, is one of great integrity and, therefore, highly dependable, it is just

possible that he suddenly passes away and leaves us in the lurch, at the crucial moment, dreaded by us so much.

(ii) Did not Śrī Rāma chide Lakṣmaṇa that the latter would do well to recount Bharatā's greatness, any length of time, much to his (Rāma's) delectation but desist from indulging in a tirade against Kaikeyi? Even so, the Āḻvār says that we will do well to meditate on the great qualities of the Lord, instead of wasting our breath in denouncing the ungrateful men of the world. There is no greater good than such sweet contemplation of the Lord, who bestows on us, the eternal reward of Heaven for the mere submission of ours to Him, "I belong to You, I am Yours". On the other hand, the result achieved by hanging on to others will hardly be commensurate with the effort put in by the supplicant.

caturam eṉṟu tammait tāmē cammatittu, iṉmoḻiyār
maturapōkam tuṟṟavarē vaiki, maṟṟu oṉṟu uṟuvar;
atirkoḷ ceykai acurar maṅka, vaṭamaturaip piṟantāṟku
etirkoḷ āḷāy uyyal allāl, illai kaṇṭīr-iṉpamē. (IX–1–5)

Translation

Alas! they that did of their ability boast and revel
In dalliance with the sweet-tongued damsels,
Will some time be by them put to shame and ridicule;
There's no greater bliss indeed than being the loving vassal
Of the Lord Who, in North Maturai, was born to quell
The fell Asuras who did perpetrate deeds abominable.

Notes

(i) With their youthful vigour and wealth drained off, the erstwhile heroes, the dynamic centre of attraction for the voluptuous women of rare beauty, fade out miserably. And yet, these men try, in vain, to trade on their past reputation and are beaten back and unrelentingly repelled by those very women on whom they had lavished their love and lucre. The necessity for alluding to the inconstancy of these base women arises from the fact

that, in this decad, the Āḻvār not only impresses the need for our giving up dependence on all our earthly relations and clinging to the Lord instead, but also brings home the grim truth that the world is steeped in ingratitude and is thus prone to spurn the erstwhile donors and benefactors. All these lead to the logical compulsion of our pinning our faith solely in Him, Who will stand by us, under all circumstances and salve us. The bliss, derived from God-love, is not only far superior to that sought in the company of the fair ladies but also everlasting.

(ii) As Nampiḷḷai puts it, all that we have to do to win the love of God is not to repel the influx of His sweet grace, as and when it descends on us. On hearing that Śrī Kṛṣṇa would be visiting Hastinapur shortly, as an emissary of the Pāṇḍavas, King Dhṛtarāṣṭra did some loud thinking, as follows: "Kṛṣṇa, the partisan of the Pāṇḍavas will be going over here shortly, to mediate on their behalf. Let us try to square him up, by giving him land and gold." The pious Sañjaya, however, cut to size the hapless old king and disabused him of his wrong notions about Lord Kṛṣṇa, by saying: "All that Kṛṣṇa would need and care for is the simple courtesy normally extended to an ordinary sojourner, namely, cool water for washing the weary feet and kind words of enquiry. Anything else, you might like to offer Him, should be out of an innate love for Him and not by way of winning Him over; in the latter case, He would just spurn it all".

(iii) The so-called earthly pleasures are always tinged with sorrow, like unto a man right on the gallows, about to be hanged, quenching his thirst and feeling satisfied or like shelter from the gruelling heat of the Sun, in the shade cast by the outstretched hood of an infuriated cobra. On the other hand, the bliss enjoyed, in the service of the Supreme Lord, is unalloyed, an end in itself, fraught with felicity.

illai kaṇṭīr iṉpam; antō! uḷḷatu niṉaiyātē,
tollaiyārkaḷ ettaṉaivar tōṉṟik kaḻintoḻintār!
mallai mūtūr vaṭamaturaip piṟantavaṉ vaṇ pukaḻē
colli uyyap pōkal allāl, maṟṟoṉṟu illai-curukkē. (IX–1–6)

Translation

Many men of yore had just come and gone,
Oblivious of the true goal eternal, alas! happiness there's none,
In this world, take note; lies indeed our salvation
In singing the glory great of the Lord, Who was born
In North Maturai, rich and hoary; this is the truth plain,
Which, in no other way, one can explain.

Notes

The Āḻvār deplores the fate of myriads of men who have come into this world and passed out, without realising the eternal values of life and the everlasting happiness resulting therefrom. What a pity! these men failed to discover that there is no real happiness over here and that the Supreme Lord alone can bestow real and lasting happiness through our loving and intimate service unto Him.

The Saint, therefore, exhorts the men of the contemporary world not to follow in the footsteps of those men of the past and get bogged down, but attain salvation by singing the great glory of Lord Kṛṣṇa who was born in North Mathura—the holy city, hallowed by the advent of Lord Vāmana and Lord Kṛṣṇa and by virtue of its having been the capital of Śatrugna, the Youngest brother of Śrī Rāma.

maṟṟoṉṟu illai; curuṅkac coṉṉōm; mā nilattu ev uyirkkum
ciṟṟa vēṇṭā; cintippē amaiyum kaṇṭīrkaḷ; antō!
kuṟṟam aṉṟu; eṅkaḷ peṟṟat tāyaṉ, vaṭamaturaip piṟantāṉ
kuṟṟam il cīr kaṟṟu, vaikal vāḻtal kaṇṭīr-kuṇamē. (IX–1–7)

Translation

Let me, in brief, tell ye, men of this sprawling world!
There's no means for your salvation except to learn and abide
In contemplation of the flawless traits of Kṛṣṇa, our Lord,

Who, in North Maturai, was born; 'tis indeed meritorious
And would suffice, no need there is for practices, tiresome and tedious.

Notes

The Āḻvār now expounds the easy worshippability of the Lord and the sweetness that flows from worshipping Him. All those, in this abode of ours, surrounded by the oceanic waters, are eligible to partake of the Āḻvār's advice and reap the rich reward. The importance of looking upon the Lord as the 'Ready Means' (siddhopāya), the Means and the End combined, is being emphasised here, when the Āḻvār asks the people to desist from any other path of discipline, entailing tedious ritualistic observances. As true knowledge of the inter-relation between Man and God will, by itself, lead to salvation (Jñānān Mokṣaḥ), mere mental awareness of the Lord's role as our sole Benefactor, with an inherent obligation to protect His feeble subjects at this end, will suffice. But then, it might be asked whether it would be faulty, rather superfluous, to sing the Lord's glory, as enjoined in this song. No, it is not at all faulty insofar as this laudation is an end in itself and not done as a means for attaining Him, in a spirit of bargaining.

The Saint exhorts the temporal beings to do nothing more than recite the Lord's names, which calls for no special effort, entailing fatigue. It may be recalled, in this context, how that great God-lover, Prahlāda invited his school-mates to ejaculate God's names effortlessly, as follows:

"Oh, Lord Supreme," by morn, "Oh, Kṛṣṇa,", at noon and "Oh, Govindā,", in the evening.

vāḻtal kaṇṭīr kuṇam itu; antō! māyavaṉ aṭi paravip
pōṟṟu pōka uḷḷakiṟkum puṉmai ilātavarkku
vāḷ tuṇaiyā vaṭamaturaip piṟantavaṉ vaṇ pukaḻē
vīl tuṇaiyāp pōm itaṉil yātum illai-mikkatē. (IX–1–8)

Translation

Alas! how ignorant of the art of living are men indeed!
No greater felicity there is unto the blemishless ones that think

Of living, in the real sense, than lovingly meditate and sing
The glory great of the One, born in North Maturai, the wondrous Lord.

Notes

(i) This is one of the several stanzas of the 'Divya Prabandhas' that lend support to Saint Rāmānuja's elucidation, in the 'Antarādhikaraṇa' of his Śrī Bhāṣya, of the main purpose of the Lord's incarnations. Although the triple functions of succouring the Saintly, vanquishing the wicked and re-establishment of the moral order of things could have as well been achieved by the mere 'Saṅkalpa' (resolve) of the Omnipotent Lord, the first part, namely, protection of the pious ones couldn't have been put through effectively, except by the Lord's actual descent into their midst. The great qualities of head and heart, freely displayed by the Lord during His Avatārs, sustain the Godly men down the ages, immersed in the sweet contemplation thereof, long after the Avatār was concluded and the Lord returned to the Celestium. This, in essence, is what 'Sādhu paritrāṇam' (protection of the pious ones) does connote. The age-long sins of appalling magnitude can get liquidated only through the contemplation of the Lord's auspicious traits and wondrous deeds.

(ii) The great Nampiḷḷai puts it that the Āḻvār deplores the callous indifference of the worldly men whom he has to invite, rather beg, to drink deep of the great delicacy that the Lord is, like unto hiring out people to come and taste the sweet sugarcane.

(iii) "The blemishless ones", mentioned in this song, are those who abide in the Lord, all the time, reading and writing about Him, listening to the pious ones and talking to them, resulting in mutual enlightenment and entertainment. This is in contradistinction to those who employ the reading, writing and talking about the Lord's great glory, as a means for eking out their material existence in luxurious style, literally pawning away God for the

enjoyment of worldly pleasures and earning their livelihood, as Parāśara Bhaṭṭārya would say.

yātum illai mikku ataṉil eṉṟu eṉṟu, atu karuti,
kātu ceyvāṉ kūtaiceytu kaṭaimuṟai vāḻkkaiyum pōm;
mā tukiliṉ koṭikkoḷ māṭa vaṭamaturaip piṟanta
tātu cēr tōḷ kaṇṇaṉ allāl, illai kaṇṭīr-caraṇē. (IX–1–9)

Translation

Things mundane, one might deem quite often,
As the goal supreme, but alas! it would dwindle down,
Like unto earlobes, disfigured with holes wide open,
By those seeking to decorate them; haven there's none
But Kaṇṇaṉ, whose shoulders are bedecked with garlands fine,
Who, in North Maturai, with banners atop the castles, was born.

Notes

(i) The Saint warns those seeking protection in any one other than the Supreme Lord, that they are in for deterioration, instead of going up the scale and that they would, in the bargain, get dislodged even from the old order of things. These men will, therefore, do well to seek refuge in the Supreme Lord, the unfailing Protector. This position is brought home vividly by citing the example of those, with charming ear-lobes, disfiguring them in the name of decorating themselves with gold ear-rings by piercing therein elongated holes. In his unique diction, Nampiḷḷai , the great glossator, puts it that even the so-called enjoyment of family life, bristling with progeny and the resultant din and tussle, will decline, when people seek the protection of any other than the Supreme Lord who, as Lord Kṛṣṇa, was born in North Mathura; they will thus be in an unenviable position, neither here nor there.

(ii) Yet another interpretation of this song, given in the commentary of Tirukkurukaippirāṉ Piḷḷāṉ, is as follows : Those that endeavour to attain 'Kaivalya mokṣa' (i.e.) enjoyment of the Self, in its disembodied state, freed from the cycle of birth and death, treating it as the Supreme goal, instead of God-enjoyment, stand to lose even the little enjoyment they had in family life. The analogy of disfiguring the ear-lobes, in the name of decorating them, holds good here also.

kaṇṇaṉ allāl, illai kaṇṭīr caraṇ; atu niṟka, vantu
maṇṇiṉ pāram nīkkutaṟkē, vaṭamaturaip piṟantāṉ
tiṇṇamā num uṭaimai uṇṭēl, avaṉ aṭi cērttu uymmiṉō;
eṇṇa vēṇṭā; nummatu ātum avaṉ aṉṟi-maṟṟu illaiyē.
(IX–1–10)

Translation

The Lord was in North Maturai born as Kaṇṇaṉ
To establish the truth that none but He is our haven sure
And to rid Mother Earth of her terrific burden;
You and what yours you deem, at His feet do offer
And salvation attain; there's no need to waver,
For there's hardly a thing that unto Him doesn't belong.

Notes

(i) The Gita Śloka, "Paritrāṇāya Sādhūnām......" has been interpreted by our Ācāryas differently, at different places, but it should not be misconstrued that they are at variance with one another. Actually, these are the different facets of the central theme, namely, the Lord is the 'Ready Means' (Siddhopāya) around whom revolves the triple functions of His Avatāras, namely, *Sustenance of the Righteous, suppression of the unrighteous* and *stabilisation of the moral order of things.* Saint Rāmānuja has held that the sole purpose of the Lord's advent on Earth is to succour the 'Sādhus' (Godly men), relegating the other two components to a secondary place, as they could as well be achieved by the Lord's mere resolve, thus dispensing with the need for His incarnation. But then, there is an aphorism in 'Śrīvaçana Bhūṣaṇam' which quotes Nañcīyar, as attributing the herculean tasks performed by the Lord during His Avatāras to His intolerance of the insults by the wicked ones on His devotees. In the eighth song of this very decad, 'Sādhu paritrāṇam' was

emphasised as the main purpose of the Lord's Avatāras. In this song, however, ridding the Earth of its unwholesome burden (destroying the wicked) has been adduced as the purpose of the Lord's advent as Śrī Kṛṣṇa. This brings into focus the aspect of extinction of the wicked ones. Actually, this aspect is but a natural corollary to 'Sādhu paritrāṇam', which comprises both the fulfilment of the thing, wished for, and elimination of the obnoxious. Further, the third aspect of the Avatāra is re-establishment of the moral order of things, which had declined alarmingly, prior to the Lord's advent. But the Lord, Whose purpose it was to resuscitate 'Dharma' and put it back on stable footing, did call upon Arjuna to give up altogether the pursuit of Dharma (Gita XVIII-66). This adds a new dimesnion to the Lord's purpose of setting up 'Dharma'. What He is after is to make us pin all our faith in Him, the 'Siddha Dharma', 'Kṛṣṇam dharmaṃ sanātanam', 'Rāmo Vigrahavān dharmaḥ'.

(ii) There's no need to waver, in regard to the submission unto the Lord of yourself and your so-called possessions, whether a particular thing belongs to you or to Him. There is hardly a thing which does not vest in Him, which you can call your own.

ātum illai maṟṟu avaṉil eṉṟu, atuvē tuṇintu,
tātu cēr tōḷ kaṇṇaṉaik kurukūrc caṭakōpaṉ ceṉṉa
tītu ilāta oṇ tamiḻkaḷ ivai āyirattuḷ ip pattum
ōta valla pirākkaḷ nammai āḷutaiyārkaḷ paṇṭē. (IX–1–11)

Translation

The benefactors great, well-versed in these songs ten,
Out of the impeccable thousand, in chaste Tamil, of Caṭakōpaṉ
Of Kurukūr, Who did his unflinching faith pin
Solely on Lord Kaṇṇaṉ, with garland bedecked,
Are unto him and others of his ilk Masters, since long back.

Notes

(i) The great ones, who learn and chant this decad, are said to attract unto them, as their vassals, the Lord's devotees like the Āḻvār, right from the moment these chanters acquired the physical frames which eventually led them on to the study and recital of this decad.

(ii) It is the Āḻvār's firm faith in the Supreme Lord, as the 'Means' and the 'End', that manifasted itself as this decad, where he declares that Lord Kṛṣṇa is all. This robust faith in Him was, in turn, induced by the Lord's exquisite Form, His sinewy shoulders sporting the lovely tuḷaci garland.

(iii) The impeccability of this hymnal has already been stressed upon, in several places. Unlike Rāmāyaṇa and Mahābhārata, which introduce several extraneous matters as well, Tiruvāymoḻi dwells exclusively on the Supreme Lord.

Ninth Centum—Second Decad (IX-2)
(Paṇṭai nāḷālē)

Preamble

The inviolable and eternal bond between us and the Supreme Lord, Who combines in Him the different facets of earthly relationship known to us, was stressed upon in the last decad, incidentally throwing overboard our so-called relationship with all the rest. The Upaniṣads proclaim that the Lord is "All-in-one', "*Mātā Pitā, Brātā, Nivāsaś Śaraṇam Suhrut gathir Nārāyaṇa*". Actually, He stays in His 'Arca' (iconic) Form, in the pilgrim centre known as Tiruppuḷiṅkuṭi, only to extend to His votaries all the benefits which they could expect from their earthly relations, mother, father, brother etc.

Therefore it is, the Āḻvār now proceeds (mentally ofcourse) to that holy centre, eager to become the recipient of the Lord's love and attention, the aggregate of all that the numerous relations could bestow. But then, the Lord remained unresponsive, without so

much as casting on the Āḷvār His sweet glances, uttering kind words of enquiry and so on. This did not, however, detract from the Āḷvār's immense faith in Him, as his all. He could certainly await, with all that robust confidence, the descent of the Lord's grace, the bestowal on him of the Lord's caressing love and attention, if not the same day, the next day or the day after. But what agitated the Āḷvār's mind, meanwhile, was the manner in which the Lord was reclining in the holy centre, without changing even once, by way of readjustment, the posture assumed by Him right at the start, a very difficult thing indeed! As a matter of fact, the Āḷvār had already echoed his anxiety, rather uneasiness, in this regard, in VIII-3-5 and this is but a follow-up. The Āḷvār, closetted with the Lord in the shrine, would now plead with the Lord privately that He should deign to move about, come forward a few paces in the company of His Divine consorts, greet him with His bewitching smiles and so on. The Āḷvār is thus seeking, in this decad, the benefits accruing from the attainment of the Lord, the final goal, lauded by him, in the preceding decad.

Meaning apart, the diction of this decad is such as to melt even stony hearts. Those of us, who get caught up in the bewildering complexities of family life, will do well to chant this decad and feel relieved and refreshed. How soothing are these verses indeed!

paṇṭai nāḷālē, niṉ tiru-aruḷum
    paṅkayattāḷ tiru-aruḷum
koṇṭu, niṉ kōyil cīyttu, palpaṭikāl
    kuṭikuṭi vaḻivantu, āṭceyyum
toṇṭarōrkku aruḷi, cōti vāy tiṟantu,
    uṉ tāmaraik kaṇkaḷāḷ nōkkāy—
teṉ tiraip porunal taṉ paṇai cūḻnta
    tiruppuḷiṅkuṭikkiṭantāṉē! (IX-2-1)

Translation

Oh, Lord, reclining in Tiruppuḷiṅkuṭi whose fields fertile are fed
By the limpid waters of 'Porunal', may You Your grace shed
On us, by you and (Lakṣmi) the lotus-born, duly blest
To serve, generation after generation, in Your vicinity sweet,
And utter from Your radiant lips words nice,
Casting glances sweet from Your lotus eyes.

Notes

(i) The Āḷvār, who seeks refuge in none but the Lord, beseeches Him to quench his God-thirst by addressing nice words unto him and cast His sweet glances on him. While making this prayer, the Saint gratefully acknowledges the influx of the combined grace of the Divine Couple on him, through successive generations, unremittingly engaged in Divine Service. Actually, in strict chronological sequence, it was the benevolent grace of the Divine Mother that was first shed on the Āḷvār, which, in turn, led to the bestowal on him of the Lord's grace, as well. It is by dint of such grace that the votaries render the appropriate kinds of service in the temples at holy pilgrim centres. Of the various kinds of service one can render, sweeping and cleansing the temple premises, ensuring their tidiness, secure the pride of place. Even Tirukkaṇṇamaṅkai Āṇṭāṉ, about whom there is a striking anecdote, in the esoteric treatise known as 'Śrīvacana Bhūṣanam', who had given up all bodily activities, presisted in rendering such service. He had, no doubt, entrusted himself to the Lord's sole keeping and yet, he deemed cleaning the temple premises as an end in itself, for the simple reason that one can easily perceive the difference between an area already cleaned and one yet to be cleaned, purely from an aesthetic point of view.

(ii) *Glances from the Lord's lotus eyes*: When Piḷḷai Tevapperumāḷ Arayar, the temple bard, sang this song in the august assembly in front of Lord Raṅganātha, he went on repeating the phrase, "Turn on me the glances sweet from your lotus eyes". Pat came the admonition from his father, Āḷvār Tiruvaraṅka Perumāḷ Arayar, as follows: "Why do you, my son, plague the Lord with such plaintive appeals? Has He not blessed you with a sweet voice to chant the sweet canticles of the Āḷvārs? Has He not also bestowed on you enough, by way of riches and children? What more do you

want from the Lord so as to pester Him with such meltingly plaintive appeals? Go ahead with your recital ".

kuṭikkiṭantu, ākkam ceytu, niṉ tīrtta
    aṭimaik kuṟṟēvalceytu, uṉ poṉ
aṭik kaṭavātē, vaḻi varukiṉṟa
    aṭiyarōrkku aruḷi, nī orunāḷ
paṭikku aḷavāka nimirtta niṉ pāta—
    paṅkayamē talaikku aṇiyāy—
koṭikkoḷ poṉ matiḷ cūḻ, kuḻir vayal colai,
    tiruppuḷiṅkuṭik kiṭantāṉē! (IX–2–2)

Translation

May You, Oh Lord! reposing in Tiruppuḷiṅkuṭi whose golden walls
Are with creepers adorned alongside fields and gardens cool,
Shed your grace on us, your vassals from generations, by You blest
To cling to Your lovely feet and render service steadfast,
And may You my head decorate with Your lotus feet,
Which did once suitably expand and span all the worlds.

Notes

(i) While praying unto the Lord at Tiruppuḷiṅkuṭi that He be pleased to place His lotus feet, the safe and easy refuge of one and all, on his head, the Āḻvār expatiates on his steadfast servanthood (śeśatva), which lends itself to four components, namely, strict adherence to the traditional creed of exclusive service unto the Lord and His devotees, enhancing the family name by enriching the tradition through rare conduct without precedent, rendering service unto the Lord with single-minded devotion, untainted by worldly pursuits and unflinching subservience to the Lord's will, as distinguished from service rendered at one's own sweet will. In regard to these components of servanthood, the illustrious author of 'Ācārya Hṛdayam' puts the Āḻvār on a par with

Bharata. When sage Vaśiṣṭa and the council of Ministers of King Daśaratha wanted to make Bharata, the king, in place of Śrī Rāma sent into exile, Bharata would not agree to it, on the ground that it would mark a daring departure from the established tradition of the Ikṣvāku dynasty whereby only the eldest son wore the crown. It is this traditional sanctity that the Āḻvār also emphasises in this song.

(ii) Indeed, Bharata added lustre to the traditional glory by leading the austere life of an ascetic during Rāma's exile, lying on a bare floor and getting his body smeared with mud and so on. Likewise, saint Nammalvār stood with eyes dried and parched-up lips, bailed out, with his palms the torrential tears from his eyes and fell down on the floor, fainting with grief, during those moments of extreme desolation, when the Lord did not favour him with His vision.

(iii) No doubt, both Lakṣmaṇa and Bharata served Śrī Rāma and yet, there was a fundamental difference between them. Whereas Lakṣmaṇa would insist that he shall follow Śrī Rāma into exile and serve Him, in every conceivable manner, Bharata's stance was one of total subservience to Śrī Rāma's sovereign will. Although his mission of getting Sri Rama, back home from exile, did not succeed, yet Bharata was happy that he could at least get the Lord's pair of sandals, as His Regent, to be installed on the throne during His absence from Ayodhya. The Āḻvār claims that he is also made of the same stuff as Bharata and is, therefore entitled to the Lord's grace. The Āḻvār also invokes the Lord's pair of feet which, in fact, had been set by Him on one and all, without distinction of high and low, during His Avatāra as the sprawling Tṛvikrama.

(iv) As regards the description, in this song, of the pilgrim centre, as one enclosed by scintillating walls adjoining fertile fields and cool gardens, there is a juicy interpretation from Nampiḷḷai, which none but one of his gigantic intellect could conceive. The grief of Sītā, in captivity,

was two-fold, namely, (i) melancholy due to her misgivings about Śrī Rāma's intention in regard to redeeming her, in view of the enormous lapse of time and (ii) dejection due to separation from her Lord. The first vanished on her meeting Hanumān. So also, the Āḷvār's dejection falls into two distinct compartments, namely, (i) apprehension of the possibility of anything untoward happening to the Lord reclining in this land of dark nescience and (ii) inability to mingle with the Lord to his heart's fill. The first part of the Āḷvār's disquietitude gets eliminated by the stately walls enclosing the holy place and what remains is the second for allaying which the Āḷvār makes the prayer, as in the third line of this song.

kiṭanta nāḷ kiṭantāy; ettaṉai kālam
  kiṭatti, uṉ tiruuṭampu acaiya!
toṭarntu kuṟṟēval ceytu tol aṭimai
  vaḻi varum toṇṭarōrkku aruḷi,
taṭam koḷ tāmaraik kaṇ viḻittu, nī eḻuntu, uṉ
  tāmarai maṅkaiyum nīyum,
iṭam koḷ mūvulakum toḻa, iruntaruḷāy-
  tiruppuḷiṅkuṭik kiṭantāṉē! (IX–2–3)

Translation

How is it, my Lord! You do in Tiruppuḷiṅkuṭi repose
In one and the same posture ever since You came there,
Not minding the pain on Your body exquisite? how long more
Will You in this manner lie? May You shed Your grace
On us, grown gray in Your service hoary and turn on us
Your lotus eyes large; may You with Your lotus-born Spouse
Remain seated so as to be adored by the three worlds spacious!

Notes

(i) Having set out, in the two preceding songs, his descent from a lineage of devout men engaged unremittingly in the self-less service of the Lord, the Āḷvār now prays unto Him to concede his wish, as follows: The Lord should rise up and turn His sweet glances on him, be seated along with Mahālakṣmī, so as to take service from him and be incidentally worshipped by the denizens of all the three worlds. It is, no doubt, a matter well within the knowledge of the Āḷvār that the Lord, in His Iconic Form, remains, for all intents and purposes, static, without altering the posture, initially assumed by Him. And yet, the Āḷvār would want the Lord to get up, be seated and so on. Actually, his predecessor Tirumaḻicai Āḷvār had similarly entreated Lord Ārāvamutaṉ, enshrined in Tirukkuṭantai (Kumbakonam, in Tamil Nāḍu) to get up and address a few words to him. However, when, in response, the Lord rose from bed a little, the Āḷvār would not be a party to the Lord disturbing Himself from His much-needed rest and therefore, requested Him to speak without getting up. The Lord is seen there, down to this day, in a posture midway between lying and sitting.

(ii) The Āḷvār would appear to have been thinking on these lines: "It is just possible that the Lord in Tiruppuḷiṅkuṭi assumed the lying posture, in response to the request of an ardent devotee. And now, the Āḷvār finds that the Lord has been lying in the same posture far too long, much to His discomfort, and very much wishes that He should certainly readjust the posture, so as to secure physical relief, the more so, when a request to this effect is made by a devotee of his calibre." Did not Āṇṭāḷ and her confreres request Lord Kṛṣṇa to get up from bed and walk down to the drawing room to grant them audience, duly seated on the throne?

puḷiṅkuṭik kiṭantu, varakuṇamaṅkai
  iruntu, vaikuntattuḷ niṉṟu,
teḷinta eṉ cintaiyakam kaḻiyātē,
  eṉṉai āḷvāy-eṉakku aruḷi,
naḷirnta cīr ulakam mūṉṟuṭaṉ viyappa,
  nāṅkaḷ kūttu āṭi niṉṟu āṟppa,
paḻiṅku nīr mukiliṉ pavaḷampōl kaṉivāy
  civappa, nī kāṇa vārāyē. (IX–2–4)

Translation

You did unto me clarity impart and would from me never depart,
Oh, my Master, reposing in Puḷiṅkuṭi, You remain seated
In Varakuṇamaṅkai and in Vaikuṇṭam You keep standing,
May You unto me shed Your grace cool that shall astound
The worlds three and make us dance with joy, let us also behold
Your bewitching fruit-like lips like unto the coral creeper
That entwines the dark cloud, laden with limpid water.

Notes

(i) In His iconic manifestation, the Lord assumes different postures; in certain pilgrim centres, He reposes, in some, He is seen seated, while, in others, He keeps standing. These can be adored individually as well as collectively, as in this song. As Saint Nammāḻvār contemplated on the manifestations of the Lord, in His worshippable Forms, at the various pilgrim centres, certain special aspects and attributes of the Lord presented themselves to him, forming the subject-matter of his meditation, in each centre. Thus, these three holy places, jointly mentioned here, throw light, according to the illuminating author of "Āçārya Hṛdayam", on the three progressive stages of God-love, known as 'Para Bhakti', 'Para Jnāna', and 'Parama Bhakti'.

Having endowed the Āḻvār with clarity of thought, shorn of doubt, discrepancy and deviation (VIII-8) and kindled in him God-love of rare magnitude, the Lord is now nestling round him in various postures, eager to get hold of him at the pinnacle of his devotion (parama Bhakti). The Lord is in the same predicament, as one, with pinching hunger, moving impatiently, in and around the kitchen where food is being cooked, vide aphorism 177 of 'Āçārya Hṛdayam'.

(ii) It will certainly astound the denizens of the three worlds when they see that the Lord has responded to the entreaties of the Āḻvār and come out of His repose; the

Āḻvār and the fellow-devotees will bubble with joy and dance, on seeing the Lord's bewitching smiles from His radiant, red lips.

pavaḷam pōl kaṉi vāy civappa, nī kāṇa
vantu, niṉ pal nilā muttam
tavaḻ katir muṟuval ceytu, niṉ
tirukkaṇ tāmarai tayaṅka niṉṟaruḷāy-
pavaḷa naṉ paṭarkkīḻ caṅku uṟai porunal
taṉ tiruppuḷiṉkuṭik kiṭantāy!
kavaḷa mā kaḷiṟṟiṉ iṭar keṭat taṭattuk
kāy ciṉap paṟavai ūrntāṉē! (IX–2–5)

Translation

My Lord, You do, in lovely Tiruppuḷiṅkuṭi, repose,
On the bank of Porunal where converge conches in plenty,
The bird (Garuḍa), who unto Your enemies is hostile, You rode
And rushed to the pond to rescue the elephant hefty;
May You deign to come a few paces, for me to behold
The smiles that play on Your coral lips which do hold
Your sparkling teeth, moon-like and Your lotus eyes, big and bold.

Note

The Āḻvār prays that the Lord be pleased to appear before him, even as He had presented Himself to Gajendra, the elephant in great distress, in response to his call for help. As the Lord paces in front of him, the Āḻvār would like to behold the Lord's sweet smiles, playing gently on His coral lips and the lovely pair of lotus eyes.

kāy ciṉap paṟavai ūrntu, poṉ malaiyiṉ
mīmicaik kār mukil pōla,
mā ciṉa māli, mālimāṉ eṉṟu aṅku
avar paṭak kaṉaṉṟu, muṉ niṉṟa
kāy ciṉa vēntē! katir muṭiyāṉē!
kali vayal tiruppuḷiṅkuṭiyāy!
kāy cina āḻi, caṅku, vāḷ, vil, taṇṭu
ēnti em iṭar kaṭivāṉē! (IX–2–6)

Translation

Your terrific anger destroys your enemies, oh, Sire,
The irate bird you rode, like unto the rain-cloud,
Perched on a mount of gold and the raging demons quelled;
The radiant crown you don and in your hands do bear
The weapons hot to cut out all my ills, oh, Lord,
May you, Who, in Tiruppuḷiṅkuṭi, have taken up abode,
Amid fields fertile, let me your lotus eyes behold.

Notes

Apprehending that the lack of response from the Lord to his entreaties, in the earlier songs, might be due to his dense sins, the Āḻvār point out to the Lord that He, who destroyed the powerful demons, Māli, Sumāli and others who preceded Rāvaṇa, should have no difficulty in destroying his sins. If the Lord's anger unto His enemies is deadly, Garuḍa, His mount, is even more hostile towards them and so are the Lord's weapons, conch, discus, mace, sword and bow, all of them breathing fire.

eṉ iṭar kaṭintu, iṅku eṉṉai āḻvāṉē!
imaiyavar tamakkum āṅku aṉaiyāy!
cem maṭal malarum tāmaraip paḻaṉat
taṉ tiruppuḷiṅkuṭik kiṭantāy!
nammuṭai aṭiyar kavvaikaṇṭu ukantu,
nām kaḷittu, uḷam nalam kūra,
im maṭa ulakar kāṇa, nī oruṇāḷ
iruntiṭāy–eṅkaḷ kaṇmukappē. (IX–2–7)

Translation

My ills you did cut out and me Your vassal made
And so do You unto the Celestials as well, my Lord:
In lovely Tiruppuḷiṅkuṭi You repose, in whose cool waters
The red lotus blooms with petals nice, may You remain seated
Just one day, so that your devotees do revel
And we thereupon rejoice and the duds on Earth behold you, as well.

Note

The Lord, Who is reposing in cool Tiruppuḷiṅkuṭi, is the Universal Saviour Who extends protection not only to the frail humans over here, in this land of dark nescience, but also to the hefty, head-swollen denizens of the upper worlds. The Āḻvār entreats the Lord to walk down to where he is, the tamarind tree in Āḻvār Tirunakari, or at least get up and remain seated. "Just for a day" should not be taken literally; it is like a man, in deep thirst, asking for water just to moisten his parched-up lips or a person wanting merely to have a glance of something hidden, which he longs to see. Certainly, on seeing the object longed for, he would want to embrace it and do things of that sort. In the process, the Āḻvār would also like to watch and enjoy the jubilation of the Lord's devotees besides giving a chance to the men of the world, caught up in worldly pursuits, to behold the Lord in the altered posture and appreciate His gracious gesture, betokening his fellow-feeling.

eṅkaḷ kaṇ mukappē, ulakarkaḷ ellām
iṇai-aṭi toḻutu, eḻutu, iṟaiñci,
taṅkaḷ aṉpu āra, tamatu col valattāl
talaittalaic ciṟantu pūcippa,
tiṅkaḷ cēr māṭat tiruppuḷiṅkuṭiyāy!
tiru vaikuntattuḷḷāy! tēvā!
iṅkaṉ mā ñālattu itanuḷum oruṇāḷ
iruntiṭāy-vīṟṟu iṭam koṇṭē. (IX–2–8)

Translation

Oh, Lord, You repose in Tiruppuḷiṅkuṭi whose castles tall
Soar right up to the Moon, in Tiruvaikuṇṭam You keep standing.
May You right here remain seated, in front of us all.
For a day at least, for the worldly men to pray in tones resounding
And prostrate with love intensified, vying with each other.

Notes

(i) The Lord is known to remain seated in the Durbar hall in the high Heavens, where He grants audience. The

Āḷvār would, however, pray unto the Lord, reclining in Tiruppuḷiṅkuṭi, to appear like-wise, right here, so as to attract the people over here and make them worship Him, to their heart's fill, in grateful appreciation of His great gesture.

(ii) *To pray in tones resounding:*

What really moves the Lord and what He looks for in us, are neither the matter comprised in the hymns we sing in His praise nor even the manner in which we sing them but cordiality and humility in our hearts. Whereas the high class brahmins, swelling with pride over their stature and learning, address the Deity, in their usual accents, high-sounding Sankrit phrases, "Victory unto You" and so on, the so-called low class people praise the Lord, in their simple, unsophisticated, rustic tongue, as follows:

"Dear Lord, do Thou drink milk! do Thou eat Fruit! do Thou wear warm clothes!" and so on.

viṟṟu iṭam koṇṭu, viyaṉkoḷ mā ñālattu
itaṉuḷum iruntiṭāy-aṭiyōm
pōṟṟi ōvātē, kaṇiṇai kuḷira,
putu malar ākattaip paruka,
cēṟṟu iḷa vāḷai cennelūṭu ukaḷum
ceḷum paṇait tiruppuḷiṅkuṭiyāy!
kūṟṟamāy, acurar kulamutal arinta
koṭuviṉaip paṭaikaḷ vallāṉē! (IX–2–9)

Translation

Oh, Lord, reposing in Tiruppuḷiṅkuṭi, amid paddy fields fertile,
Where fishes young wade thro' water in marshy soil,
Oh, wielder of weapons which deal on the Asurās blows deadly!
May You, in this land vast, remain seated stately,
For us, your vassals, to sing your praise in benedictive hymns

And for ever drink deep the exquisite charm
Of your delicate form, like unto flower in fresh bloom.

Notes

(i) The Lord, in His boundless grace, has deigned to come to this distasteful land, with all its dirt and devilry, and present His worshippable Form to the householders over here, despite their callous indifference. It is indeed an act of grace galore, on His part, to have condescended, out of sheer love, to make Himself visible to the worldly men, who love all but Him Who really matters. Well, it is in His Arcā (Worshippable) Form that the Lord hangs on, willy-nilly, to the frail mankind and tries to redeem them, at all costs, their indifference notwithstanding, vide also aphorism 38 of 'Śrīvaçana Bhūṣaṇam'.

(ii) The Āḷvār has no doubt enjoyed the reclining pose of the Lord at Tiruppuḷiṅkuṭi. And yet, he longs to see Him seated and enjoy the new posture of the Lord, his eyes drinking deep the nectarean Form of the Lord. Śrī Parāśara Bhaṭṭar would say that one can revel in Śrīraṅgam, beholding the Lord in a reclining as well as standing posture and Goddess Raṅganāyakī, in the sitting posture.

koṭu viṉaip paṭaikaḷ vallaiyāy, amararkku
iṭar keṭa, acurarkaṭku iṭar cey
kaṭu viṉai nañcē! eṉṉuṭai amutē!
kali vayal tiruppuḷiṅkuṭiyāy!
vaṭivu iṇai illā malarmakaḷ, maṟṟai
nilamakaḷ piṭikkum mel aṭiyaik
koṭuviṉaiyēṉum piṭikka, nī oruṇāḷ
kūvutal, varutal ceyyāyē. (IX–2–10)

Translation

My Lord, reposing in Tiruppuḷiṅkuṭi amid fields fertile,
Your valiant weapons are unto Asuras deadly and do the
Devas succour;

You, my Nectar, may you beckon me or draw unto me near,
Just one day, that I may stroke your feet tender,
Your lotus and earth-born Spouses of peerless beauty press gently.

Notes

(i) It may be recalled that the gnostic Mother of Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī had referred to the latter, in VI-5-10, as the proto-type of the three Divine Spouses, Mahālakṣmī, Mother Earth and Nappiṉṉai. And now, the Āḻvār requests the Lord that he may be granted an opportunity to massage His tender feet which even His delicate Spouses of matchless charm handle with great care and press gently. For this purpose, the Lord should either beckon the Āḻvār to where He is or come down to his place.

(ii) No doubt, the Lord is, according to His own admission and the verdict of the Vedas, absolutely impartial to one and all, bereft of love and hatred to any—"Samoham sarvabhūteṣu nadveṣyośti na priyaḥ." "Devānām thānavānānça sāmānyamathi Deivatam" etc. If it is still mentioned here that He is a veritable poison unto the Asuras, unleashing on them His lethal weapons of enormous power and succours the Devas unto whom He is sweet as nectar, there is hardly any contradiction. Did not the Lord bestow His grace and affections on Prahlāda and Vibhīṣaṇa of Rākṣasa clan? Did He not try His utmost to bring round such a heinous offender as Rāvaṇa, who deserved to be slain with a single arrow, even as the far more powerful Vāli was done away with? If the ungodly Asuras rush to their doom, even as the flies get burnt out by the glowing lamp and people fall into tanks, dug for common good and commit suicide, surely, it is no blot on the Lord's impartiality. Verily, one man's food is another's poison. Here then is the Nectar of the Āḻvār, reposing in Tiruppuḷiṅkuṭi, got at without going through the arduous process of churning the deep ocean and all that.

(iii) For the fulfilment of his wish, the Āḻvār suggests that the Lord could either send for him or come down to him. In point of relative importance, the Lord's condescending visit to the Āḻvār is indeed more important than His beckoning the Āḻvār and the two should have been more appropriately mentioned in the reverse order. Nampiḷḷai's thought-provoking explanation for the present order of mention is that the Āḻvār would prefer being sent for, so that he could witness and enjoy the grand setting in which the Divine Spouses engage themselves in massaging the Lord's tender feet with meticulous care, a setting, the Āḻvār dared not disturb by making the Lord's visit to him, as his first choice.

kūvutal varutal ceytiṭāy eṉṟu,
kurai kaṭal kaṭaintavaṉ-taṉṉai
mēvi naṉku amarnta viyaṉ puṉal porunal
vaḻuti nāṭaṉ, caṭakōpaṉ
nā iyal pāṭal āyirattuḷḷum
ivaiyum ōr pattum vallārkaḷ
ōvutal iṉṟi ulakam mūṉṟu aḷantāṉ
aṭi-iṇai uḷḷattu ōrvārē. (IX-2-11)

Translation

Those that are well-versed in these songs ten,
Out of the thousand from the sweet tongue of Caṭakōpaṉ,
Chief of Vaḻutināṭu, where Porunal with water full does run,
Who supplicated the Lord, who did the roaring ocean churn,
Either to beckon him or unto him come down,
Whom the Lord did graciously oblige and sustain,
Will for ever meditate upon the feet of the one,
Who once did all the three worlds span.

Note

The Lord, who exerted Himself a lot to meet the aspiration of the self-centred Devas and got them ambrosia from the depths of the Milk-ocean, will certainly fulfil the wishes of the selfless devotees like the Āḻvār. The chanters of this decad will also be capacitated to enshrine the Lord's pair of feet in their hearts and meditate on them, without intermission.

Ninth Centum—Third Decad (IX-3)
(Ōr āyiramāy)

Preamble

In the last decad, the Āḷvār fervently prayed that the Lord be pleased to turn His sweet glances on him, grant audience to him and the denizens of all the three worlds, remaining in a seated posture, beckon him or come down to him and permit him to stroke His lovely pair of feet and so on. The Lord, however, focussed the Saint's attention on the fundamental relationship that subsists between them, which hardly affords scope for such entreaties by him and, much less, for the grief that results from the Lord's apparent non-compliance. The basic fact of the Lord being none other than Nārāyaṇa, in whom all things and beings inhere and who abides in all, reduces all things and beings to the abject position of mere bodies unto the Life within, that dominates, directs, and supports them. Consoled thus by the Lord, in quite a convincing manner, the Saint not only regains his composure but admires the Lord's tender solicitude for His subjects. This decad gives expression to the Saint's rapturous admiration of the Lord's great concern for His creatures and loving condescension. Having set out in VIII-8, the substance of the eight-lettered, three-syllabled Tirumantra and dwelt on the deep urge for Divine Service which 'Āya', the dative case-ending of the word 'Nārāyaṇāya' in the said Mantra reveals, the Āḷvār spells out the Mantra itself, in the opening song of this decad, which declares: "Nārāyaṇaṉ is our sole Benefactor".

ōr āyiramāy ulaku ēḻ aḷikkum
    pēr āyiram koṇṭatu ōr pītu uṭaiyaṉ,
kār āyiṉa kāḷa nal mēṉiyiṉaṉ,
    nārāyaṇaṉ, naṅkaḷ pirāṉ-avaṉē. (IX–3–1)

Translation

Nārāyaṇaṉ is our sole Benefactor Who bears
A thousand names and the seven worlds succours;
Indeed, each name of the cloud-hued Lord of exquisite form
Will the functions fulfil of a thousand names.

Notes

(i) When it is said that the Supreme Lord bears a thousand names, "Devo nāmasahasravān", it only means 'many' and not literally limited to a bare thousand. When it is said, pointing to a band of valiant warriors of established fame, that each one of them is equivalent to a thousand fighters, we don't take this figure literally but understand that each one possesses the strength and skill of many. Even so, the Lord bears innumerable names, each of which has the potentiality of several other names and fulfils the multifarious functions of the Lord. Indeed, the holy names of the Lord are most endearing and soothing to a great degree. Koyilāyttāṉ a staunch disciple of Śrī Parāśara Bhaṭṭar had a son, named after the Āçārya, out of love for him. The son, however, passed away, plunging Koyilāyttāṉ in inconsolable grief. Bemoaning his great loss, he cast himself at the feet of the Ācārya who consoled him thus: "I know your grief is so great, because your son bore my name, which is very dear unto you. Now, I ask you not to grieve any more, for I bear that name and am alive to comfort you". So saying, the compassionate Āçārya got an image made like himself and handed it to the bereaved disciple, to dwell upon lovingly, as a holy Souvenir.

(ii) The Lord's exquisite Form helps one to see, in Him, the aggregate of the excellences denoted by His numerous names and enjoy them, all at once. His Form thus impounds His names like the embankment which contains the flooding waters, preventing their erosive excursions in different directions.

avaṉē akal ñālam paṭaittu iṭantāṉ;
    avaṉē aḵtu uṇṭu umiḻntāṉ, aḷantāṉ;
avaṉē avaṉum, avaṉum, avaṉum;
    avaṉē maṟṟu ellāmum-aṟintaṉamē. (IX–3–2)

Translation

'Tis He Who did ordain the spacious Universe
And pulled it out from beneath the deep waters
'Tis He Who the said Universe did gulp once,
Then spat and spanned; he (Brahmā), he (Śivā) and he (Indra), He is,
And all other things and beings, He is besides;
[This] we learn (thro' knowledge by Him bestowed).

Note

The Supreme Lord, as the great Ordainer of the Universe, combines in Himself all the three causes of creation, the material, the operative and the instrumental. He is also the Universal Saviour Who sustained the Universe inside His stomach, during the deluge, rescued it from the oceanic depths after encountering the formidable Hiraṇyākṣa, the golden-eyed demon and so on. The lands expropriated by the powerful Mahābali were reclaimed by the Lord by spanning all the worlds, in just three strides, and restored to the Devās. The Lord is the Internal Controller of one and all, without distinction of high and low; the original text of the song runs as " He is he, he and he....", in the Vedic pattern of '*Sa* Brahmās *sa* Śivas *sa* Indras sokṣaraḥ Paramaśvarāṭ...." (Puruṣa Sūkta). The pronoun ' He ', occuring seven times, in the original text of this song, is indicated by ' Saḥ ' (He) occuring in the above vedic text. The exalted Brahmā, Śiva, Indra and other Celestials as well as the ordinary denizens elsewhere are all dominated by the Lord, as their Internal Controller, a fact revealed to the Āḻvār by the Lord Himself, vide I-1-1.

aṟintaṉa vēta arum poruḷ nūlkaḷ
aṟintaṉa koḷka, arum poruḷ ātal;
aṟintaṉar ellām ariyai vaṇaṅki,
aṟintaṉar-nōykaḷ aṟukkum maruntē. (IX–3–3)

Translation

The texts, that reveal the Vedic truths abstruse, apprehend
The Lord as no more than One difficult to comprehend;

The learned ones who propitiate Him do no better fare,
They look upon Him as no more than the certain cure
For their ills and evils; (they perceive Him not
As the fountain source of bliss supreme and on Him dote not.)

Note

The Vedas proclaimed, " Vedāha metaṁ Puruṣaṁ Mahāntaṁ.... ", that is, the Supreme Lord has been comprehended by them. But what indeed did they know except that the Lord is not easy of comprehension? The ' Itihāsas ' (Rāmāyaṇa and MahāBhārata) and the ' Purāṇas', which serve as the key to the study of the Vedas, fare no better. And what about the great sages like Vyāsa, Parāśara and Vālmīki? They could see in the Lord, no more than the cure for all their ills and evils—" Haraṇā Deva dukkānāṁ Haṟṟtyabhidīyate ". It is a pity, they could not delve deeper than this and revel in His exquisite Form and nectarean sweetness, as the Āḻvār Saints did.

maruntē naṅkāḷ pōka makiḻccikku eṉṟu
perum tēvar kuḻāṅkaḷ pitaṟṟum pirāṉ,
karum tēvaṉ, emmāṉ, kaṇṇaṉ, viṇ ulakam
tarum tēvanai cōrēl kaṇṭāy, maṉamē! (IX–3–4)

Translation

Lose not, my mind, your hold on Kaṇṇaṉ, our dark-hued Sire,
The Lord, Who the heavenly bliss does grant,
Whose glory, as their elixir, the great stabiliser
Of their bliss in heaven, the Celestials do for ever chant.

Notes

(i) The Āḻvār exhorts his mind, as follows:
" The Lord of nectarean sweetness, unto the Celestials in Heaven, came down here as kṛṣṇa, to put us also in Heaven, in the midst of the ' Nitya Sūris ' over there. Having got at such a great Benefactor, cling fast to Him and never loosen Your grip on Him ".

(ii) Even the Lord's charming beauty is an impediment for service, as it steals away the hearts of the devotees,

thereby tending to slacken the service. Even as the prayer for service, contained in 'Dvaya', the 'Mantra Ratna' (Gem of a Mantra), is eternal, prayer for the eradication of the obstacle to Divine service should also be eternal, for the reason that this obstacle confronts even the inhabitants of Heaven, namely, the 'Released' souls and the Ever-free (Nitya Sūrīs). This has been brought out, in this song, through a statement ascribed to the 'Nitya Sūris' that even they, in Heaven, get thrown off their feet by the ecstasy of the Lord's personal charms and the marvellous communications from that inexhaustible fountain of bliss. They get cured of such temporary aberrations by the Lord Himself, Who serves as the stabilising antidote (Elixir) and puts them back on the right track, namely, self-less service unto the Lord, bereft of the last shred of selfish enjoyment and happiness of their own.

maṉamē! uṉṉai valviṉaiyēṉ irantu,
  kaṉamē colliṉēṉ-itu cōrēl kaṇṭāy!-
puṉam meviya pūn taṇ tuḷāy alaṅkal,
  iṉam ētum ilāṉai aṭaivatumē. (IX-3-5)

Translation

You, my mind, this sinner dire does entreat
And tell in accent firm that you shall be resolute
And attain the Lord of peerless charm, Who sports
The lovely garland of tuḷaci, cool and fine
That thrives so well on His charming person.

Note

Apprehending that his mind might treat his advice lightly and even brush it aside, the Āḷvār stresse: again, the imperative need of its sticking to the Supreme Lord of exquisite charm, bedecked with tuḷaci garland, cool and fragrant. This is like entreating a person to drink the delicious milk. In Vaiṣṇava symbology, the holy tuḷaci wreath (Vaijayanti) is Lord Viṣṇu's sovereign insignium, proclaiming His Universal Lordship. The great Naňciyar would go into

raptures on beholding Namperumāḷ, the mobile Deity in Śrīraṅgam, decked with tuḷaci wreaths, during the ceremonial processions. He would then recite this song which sent him into transport of joy.

aṭaivatum aṇi ār malar maṅkaitōḷ;
  miṭaivatum acurarkku vem pōrkaḷē;
kaṭaivatum kaṭaluḷ amutam; eṉ maṉam
  uṭaivatum avaṟkē-oruṅkākavē. (IX-3-6)

Translation

Thaws down my mind fully, steeped in contemplation
Of the Lord's dalliance with His bejewelled spouse, lotus-born,
His encounters fierce with Acurars and His churning the ocean
To grant unto Devas, ambrosia, out of deep compassion.

Note

The Āḷvār's mind having responded to his appeal exceedingly well, he now describes its ecstatic reactions, in the course of its contemplation of the Lord's glorious deeds and auspicious traits. The Āḷvār's mind thaws down, as it dwells on the Lord's tender solicitude even for the selfish and self-centred Devas and the enormous pains He had taken to churn the ocean and secure for them the ambrosia, longed for by them. According to Nampiḷḷai, it looks as if the Lord churned the Milk-ocean, just to churn the minds of devotees of the Āḷvār's calibre and intensify their God-love.

ākam cēr naraciṅkam-atuāki, ōr
  ākam vaḷ ukirāl piḷantāṉ uṟai
māka vaikuntam kāṇpataṟku eṉ maṉam
  ēkam eṇṇum-irāppakal iṉṟiyē. (IX-3-7)

Translation

'Tween day and night, my mind makes no distinction,
Yearn it does, all the time, to behold the high Heaven,
The abode great of the Lord, Who did combine

Man and lion in a single form and cleaved in twain,
With nails sharp, yet another form (of Iraṇiyaṉ)

Notes

(i) The Āḻvār says that his mind, which revelled in the contemplation of the Lord's wondrous deeds, now longs to see the Lord in His transcendent glory, in the High Heavens.

(ii) It is indeed a very odd combination, outside the realm of possibility, the conjunction of Man and Lion, in a single frame. And yet, the Omni-potent Lord assumed such a Form, in His unbounded zeal for the welfare of Prahlāda, the young devotee, *par excellence*. Deeply implanted in the Āḻvār's chastened mind, even at that distance of time, was the strange but highly delectable form of the Man-Lion (*Narasimha*).

iṉṟip pōka iruviṉaiyum keṭuttu,
oṉṟi yākkai pukāmai uyyakkoḷvāṉ
niṉṟa vēṅkaṭam nīḷ nilattu uḷḷatu;
ceṉṟu tēvarkaḷ kaitoḻuvārkaḷē. (IX–3–8)

Translation

Right in this sprawling world is the holy mount Vēṅkaṭam,
Where stands the Lord, Who the devotees awaits and salves them,
Clearing them of fruits, good and bad; Celestials they could be deemed,
That unto the holy Mount repair and worship the Lord Supreme

Notes

(i) In the preceding song, the Āḻvār longed for the vision of the Lord in Heaven but that would not be possible in this material body. The Lord, however, pointed out to the Āḻvār the possibility of his enjoying, right in this body, the Lord at Tiruvēṅkaṭam, in this very land. But the Āḻvār avers that it is only the stout-hearted Devas, who can remain stable and enjoy the Lord at Tiruvēṅkaṭam and that it would be next to impossible

for men of his melting tenderness of heart, breaking down in ecstasy, eyes swimming with tears of delight and faltering legs, to steady themselves and worship Lord Veṅkaṭēśa. And so, according to the Āḻvār, Tiruvēṅkaṭam, though situated on Earth, affords little scope for worship, by one of his stance.

(ii) It is the Lord's spontaneous grace that extricates the subjects from the clutches of the fruits of their good and bad actions which consign them to Svarg and hell, respectively. The one is as much an impediment as the other, to the final emancipation of the individual. The upaniṣads declare that the fruits, either way, have to be enjoyed by the individual soul, unless the Lord, in His redemptive grace, cuts them out and puts the subject in Heaven, with a clean slate, unencumbered in any way, by one thing or the other, 'merit' as well as 'demerit'.

toḻutu, mā malar nīr cuṭar tūpam koṇṭu
eḻutum eṉṉumitu mikai; ātaliṉ,
paḻutuil toḻ pukaḻp pāmpu-aṇaip paḷḷiyāy!
taḻuvumāṟu aṟiyēṉ-uṉa tāḷkaḷē. (IX–3–9)

Translation

Oh, Lord, resting on serpent bed, 'tis your ancient glory flawless
That one can worship you with no effort; I am at a loss,
How indeed I can your feet attain, for heavy you deem
The ritualistic worship with flowers fine, lamp and fragrant fumes.

Note

The Lord refutes the stand taken by the Āḻvār, in the preceding song, that only Devas can possibly worship the Lord at Tiruvēṅkaṭam, by pointing out to him that even men of this world do go there and worship. But then, the Āḻvār is quick to realise that the Lord's tender solicitude for His subjects is such that He deems even the simple service of offering flowers and sacramental water and burning incense before Him, much-too-heavy. This, the Āḻvār points out

to the Lord and enquires of Him what service he could render unto Him. The Vedic text, 'Bhūyiṣṭāṁ te namauktiṁ videma' is interpreted, by some, as "we will utter, in plenty, the word 'namaḥ'," meaning that we do not belong to ourselves but exclusively to the Lord. The great Vaiṣṇava preceptors would, however, interpret it, in the light of this particular song, emphasising the Lord's remarkable tenderness of heart and amazing solicitude for His subjects. Accordingly, the text in question is taken by them to mean: "We will utter the word 'namaḥ' which, according to Your extra-liberal standards, is too weighty a submission by us". The prose order is arranged as "te bhūyiṣṭāṁ nama uktiṁ videma", in order to get at this meaning. In fine, the Āḷvār says that it is well nigh impossible to render any service to the Lord, when one meditates on His remarkable tenderness of heart, which makes Him look upon even the simple offerings like flowers and water and burning incense as part of worship, as imposing a heavy burden on Him. This is indeed very true to His time-honoured fame, as One of easy worshippability.

tāḷa tāmaraiyāṉ uṉatu untiyāṉ;
 vāḷ koḷ nīḷ maḻu-āḷi uṉ ākattāṉ;
āḷarāyt toḻuvārum amararkaḷ;
 nāḷum eṉ pukaḻkō-uṉa cīlamē? (IX–3–10)

Translation

You do on your navel bear the one on lotus petal born
While he who wields the trident, long and bright, does lean
On your person; tender love you bear unto the Devas, who pose
As your vassals; were I to laud your grace galore
Till the end of time, would it exhaust your glory great?

Note

The Āḷvār is weighed down by the amazing simplicity of the Lord and His grace galore, extended even to the selfish Devas, the denizens of the upper worlds, and the self-centred Brahmā and Rudra, by holding the former right on His navel and by assigning a part of His body to the latter.

Surely, even persons, quite competent to sing the Lord's praise, can never exhaust it, although they sing His glory for all time.

cīlam ellai-ilāṉ aṭimēl, aṇi kōlam
 nīḷ kurukūre caṭakōpaṉ col-
mālai āyirattuḷ ivai pattiṉiṉ-
 pāḷar vaikuntam ēṟutal pāṉmaiyē. (IX–3–11)

Translation

'Tis but natural that those somehow associated with these songs ten,
Out of the thousand, in the hymnal garland of Kurukūr Caṭakōpān,
Adoring the feet of the Lord of loving condescension
And boundless compassion, do ascend the high Heaven.

Notes

(i) This decad is in adoration of the Lord's loving condescension which knows no limits. The Supreme Lord, higher than whom there is none, freely mingles, without any qualms, compunction or mental reservation, with the lowest of the lowly.

(ii) Contemplating the Lord's grace galore, the Āḷvār also goes to the extent of asserting that even those, who are in some way, however remote, associated with these ten songs, will ascend the high Heaven, as a matter of course. It is not necessary that one should get these songs by wrote of heart or delve deep into their meanings for reaping the benefit of natural entry into Heaven, set out in this decad. It will suffice if one manages to remain in the place where these songs are sung, no matter even if one is inclined to doze about and gets actually landed in sleep. Even for such a person, Heaven becomes, as it were, the heir-loom, as Nampiḷḷai puts it, by way of driving home the benefit, spelt out in this end-song.

Ninth Centum—Fourth Decad (IX-4)
(Maiyār Karuṅkaṇṇi)

Preamble

The 'Śāstras' (Scriptural texts) proclaim, on the one hand, that the Supreme Lord is One of unbridled independence, and on the other, depict Him as an embodiment of innumerable auspicious traits. The latter get submerged when the former holds sway. But when the Lord's independence gets subdued through the irresistible spell cast by Mahā Lakṣmī's personal magnetism and the persuasive eloquence of Her pleadings, the auspicious qualities denoted by His name, 'Nārāyaṇa', become pronounced. These are: Tender solicitude (vātsalya), Sovereignty (Svāmitva), Loving condescension (Sauśilya), Easy accessibility (Saulabhya), knowledge (Jñāna) and Power or Energy (Śakti). Fully aware that the Lord does possess, *inter alia*, the trait of loving condescension and that the Divine Mother is the fountain source of inspiration for the influx of this grand trait, the Āḷvār naturally grieved, all the more, over his erstwhile plight of separation from the Lord, despite his inordinate longing for incessant communion with Him. The Āḷvār pined for the on-coming of the Lord, in the manner He rushed to the rescue of Gajendra, the pious elephant in dire distress and sprang forth from the pillar to shed His unique grace on Prahlādha, the young devotee. The Lord, on His part, was keen to maintain His reputation as the Repository of all auspicious qualities and presented Himself to the Āḷvār; if He did not respond to the Āḷvār's call even now, despite His deep yearning, all that is claimed for Him by the Scriptures would be of no more than academic value, mere words, high-sounding like the roaring of the sea. Overjoyed by the Lord's presence (mental vision), the Āḷvār ends up this decad by giving vent ro his gratitude for the Lord having pressed him into service and got these hymns, sung by him, for the edification of the pious. "What a bliss and that too, bestowed on a single individual!" is how the Āḷvār revolves in his mind.

mai ār karuṅkaṇṇi, kamala malarmēl
ceyyāḷ tirumārviṉil cēr tirumālē!
veyyār cuṭar-āḻi, curi caṅkam ēntum
kaiyā! uṉṉaik kāṇak karutum-eṉ kaṇṇē. (IX–4–1)

Translation

Oh, Lord holding the Conch lovely and the dazzling discus hot,
Long do my eyes to behold You; on Your winsome chest,
You bear, oh, Tirumāl, (Lakṣmī) the lotus-born of complexion red,
Whose dark eyes are with collyrium neatly dressed.

Notes

(i) The Āḷvār longs to behold the grand assembly of the Divine Mother of exquisite charm and the powerful conch and discus on the Lord's person, the former on His broad chest and the latter in His lovely hands.

(ii) *The Divine Consort with collyrium-dressed eyes*:

It is imperative that Mahā Lakṣmī, the eternal Spouse of the Supreme Lord, the great intercessor between man and God, should always be in Conjunction with the Lord. The Divine Mother's presence, beside the Lord, is necessary when the subject submits to His protection, so as to make him shed all fear of punishment at the hands of the strict and unrelenting judge and secure His succour, sure and certain, through the Mother's recommendatory role. If, in the exercise of unbridled independence, the Lord, however, turned a deaf ear to the Mother's entreaty, the beloved Spouse that she is, she unleashes her irresistible physical charms and casts a bewitching spell on Him; enthralled by her ravishing beauty, He then carries out her dictates, in full. Again, after the subject's admission to the Lord's sweet fold, the Mother's presence is essential, so as to enable the subject to render the coveted service unto the Divine Couple. The enthralling charm of the Mother's eyes being thus the main source of his sustenance, the Āḷvār naturally dwells on the beauty of Her eyes, right at the beginning of this song (as in the original text). The Mother's dark eyes have a natural, built-in grace of their own and hardly need any make-up, by way of dressing them with collyrium, which is but an auspicious formality, gone through, as a matter-of-course.

(iii) *Lakṣmī, the lotus-born of red complexion*: Emerging from the red lotus, the Divine Mother acquires its colour as well—"Padme sthitām padma varṇām", as the Śrī-Sūkta says. The lotus-born Lakṣmī found even the lotus petals, known for their softness, a little too hard for her tender feet and chose to get herself lodged on the Lord's winsome chest. It is indeed a case of mutual attraction, the Lord succumbing to the Mother's charms and the latter, in turn, getting intoxicated by the Lord's exquisite Form. As Nampiḷḷai would put it, the Mother feels drawn to the lovely conch and discus, gracefully held by the Lord, in His hands, even as the Lord is attracted by the lotus flower held by the Mother.

(iv) Instead of saying straightaway that he pines for the Lord's presence in sweet conjunction with the Divine Mother and the lovely weapons, the Āḷvār says that his eyes long to behold Him. This is like the hungry beggar pleading for the appeasement of his child's hunger first.

kaṇṇē! uṉṉaik kāṇak karuti, eṉ neñcam,
eṉṉēkoṇṭa cintaiyatāy, niṉṟu iyampum;
viṇṇōr muṉivarkku eṉṟum kāṇpu-ariyāyai
naṇṇātoḻiyēṉ eṉṟu nāṉ aḻaippaṉē. (IX-4-2)

Translation

Many a thought thinks my revolving mind,
Eager to behold You, virtually my pair of eyes;
I beckon You, even celestials and sages can't visualise,
For, to attain You, I am fully determined.

Notes

(i) Having pointed out the longing of his eyes in the preceding song, the Āḷvār now recounts the manner in which he and his mind yearn to get at the Lord. The Lord has been described as the Āḷvār's pair of eyes. This follows the Vedic text, "Cakṣucca dhraṣṭavyañca Nārāyaṇaḥ", declaring the Lord as the eyes; even as the eyes help us to see all things around, the Lord helps us to behold Him without whose loving grace, none can have so much

as a glimpse of Him. When the Āḷvār says that his mind longs to look at the Lord, it only means that his eyes, confederate with his mind, long to see Him. The eyes, by themselves, cannot see a thing, even though they may be wide open, when the mind is pre-occupied with something else; hence, the necessity of the mind's active conjunction with the eyes. In the case of the worldlings (Samsāris), the mind and the eyes will be steeped in sensual pleasures. But here is the Āḷvār whose mind and eyes stand rivetted to the Lord, in the manner Lord Kṛṣṇa set out in His Song Celestial, "Yasyāṁ jāgrati bhūtāni Sā niśā paśyato muneḥ" (Gīta II-69).

(ii) The many thoughts pondered over by the Alvār's mind are but the different ways or facets of God-enjoyment, as set out by Saint Rāmānuja in 'Śrī Vaikunṭa Gadya", in the string of Ślokas from 'Kadhā ahaṁ', up to āsām vartayitvā'. The Alvar's mind cries out and thus discharges the function of the tongue as well.

(iii) True it is, that the Lord is not easily attainable even by Brahmā and other Celestials and sages of the eminence of Sanaka, Sanandana etc. And yet, the Āḷvār is intent upon gaining access to the Lord, who could certainly break all precedents and get within the Āḷvār's reach, even as He had dowered on him, out of His spontaneous grace, perfect knowledge, shorn of doubt, despair, discrepancies and deviations.

aḻaikkiṉṟa aṭiṉāyēṉ, nāy kūḻai vālāl
kuḻaikkiṉṟatu pōla, eṉ uḷḷam kuḻaiyum;
maḻaikku aṉṟu kuṉṟam eṭuttu ā-nirai kāttāy!
piḻaikkiṉṟatu aruḷ eṉṟu pēturuvaṉē. (IX-4-3)

Translation

The mind of this base fellow, lying low and calling You out,
Whirls like unto the dog eagerly twisting its tail short;
You held once, oh Lord Mount (Govardhan) aloft

And spared the cattle, the fury of the rains;
Me Your grace evades and this my mind does pain.

Notes

(i) The Āḷvār feels agitated why the Lord, who sheds His grace on all yearning votaries, should withhold it from him alone, in spite of his inordinate longing for incessant communion with Him.

(ii) The Āḷvār submits that he is fully aware of his humble stature and yet, devoured by inordinate God-love, he keeps calling Him, like unto a dog trying hard to express its feelings to its master by twisting its tail. Pity unto the dog, with a short tail, which cannot function in this regard as effectively as a tail of better length! The Āḷvār feels that he too is in the same predicament as the dog with a dwarf tail, unable to express adequately his pangs of separation from the Lord. To a question, supposed to have been put to him by the Lord, as to why he aspires for Him without the requisite means and equipment, the Āḷvār rejoins that He has to shed on him His redemptive grace, in the same way as He shielded the cattle and shepherds from the terrific rains, unleashed by Indra, by holding aloft Mount Govardhan.

uṟuvatu itu eṉṟu, uṉakku āḷ-paṭṭu, niṉkaṉ
peṟuvatu etukol eṉṟu, pētaiyēṉ neñcam
maṟukal ceyyum-vāṉavar tāṉavarkku eṉṟum
aṟivatu ariya ariyāya ammāṉē! (IX-4-4)

Translation

Oh, Lord Ari, none can ever aver what you are,
This vassal knows not what for him is in store,
Whether he will attain and serve You for ever
Or be caught in the vortex of worldly life,
My ignorant mind is indeed in a state of strife.

Notes

(i) When one submits to the Lord's protection, true to one's essential nature of exclusive dependence on the Lord one has indeed to resign oneself to His good grace and benign will, without casting doubts of any kind on His dispensation. It should indeed be left to the Lord's sweet will and discretion to deal with us in any manner He deems fit and feasible. And yet, the Āḷvār feels agitated whether the Lord would at all be pleased to bless him with eternal service unto Him in close proximity or still keep him on, in the bondage of 'Samsāra'. The Āḷvār's misery is all the more poignant, he being right in the vanguard of 'Prapannas', whose firm conviction it is, that the Lord is their Sole Sustainer on whom they are totally dependent. It is the exuberance of God-love, which induces such frightful misgivings in the Āḷvār, despite his firm faith in the Lord and his awareness of this *prima facie* contradiction, between conviction and conduct, only goes to augment his misery.

(ii) When questioned by the Lord as to why he allowed himself to be haunted by such fears, the Āḷvār observes that neither he Devas nor the Asuras could comprehend His true nature and manner of dispensation and it was just possible that the Lord had put bin also on the same footing.

ariyāya ammāṉai, amarar pirāṉai,
periyāṉai, piramaṉai muṉ paṭaittāṉai,
vari vāḷ-aravin aṇaip paḷḷikoḷkiṉṟa
kariyāṉ kaḻal kāṇak karutum-karuttē. (IX-4-5)

Translation

Long do I, in my thoughts, to behold the feet of the dark-hued Lord,
Who does on the somnolent serpent-bed lovely repose, the benevolent Overlord
Of the Celestials, the Lord Supreme, the Sire great,
Who does His devotees' opponents quell, Who did create
Piramaṉ (Brahmā, the four-headed), first and foremost.

Note

That the Lord is most easily accessible to the devout and much beyond the reach of others has been highlighted by the Āḷvār

himself, in I-3. This has now been pointed out to the Āḻvār by the Lord, who confesses to His easy-accessibility and enquires of the Āḻvār what precisely he wanted from Him. The Āḻvār wants nothing more than beholding the Lord's lovely pair of feet, against the exquisite background of His serpent-bed and his enticing Form, like unto a dark emerald in sweet repose.

karuttē! uṉṉaik kāṇak karuti, eṉ neñcattu
iruttāka iruttiṉēṉ; tēvarkaṭku ellām
viruttā! viḷaṅkum cuṭarcōti uyarattu
oruttā! uṉṉai uḷḷum eṉ uḷḷam-ukantē. (IX-4-6)

Translation

You are my very thought, oh, Lord, to behold You, I am determined
And so, You I have planted firmly in my mind;
Up above the Celestials You do soar, you remain
With splendour unique, high up in the effulgent Heaven
Ever do my thoughts in You abide, in sweet contemplation.

Note

The Lord having entered the Āḻvār's mind, in response to his entreaties in the five preceding songs, the Āḻvār now says that he has, for ever, impounded in his mind the Lord who is higher than the highest. He looks upon the Lord as his very thought sticking fast unto Him.

ukantē uṉṉai uḷḷum eṉ uḷḷattu akampāl—
akam-tāṉ amarntē iṭam koṇṭa amalā!
mikum tāṉavaṉ mārvu akalam iru kūṟā
nakantāy! naraciṅkam-atu āya uruvē! (IX-4-7)

Translation

Oh, immaculate Lord, In me seated firm, You remain,
Your potent nails tore the haughty demon's broad chest in twain,

Oh, Naraciṅka, revels indeed the inner core of my heart
In the enjoyment of You, my Lord, so sweet.

Note

The Āḻvār feels gratified that the Lord has responded to his call even as He did, in the case of Prahlādā to cater to whose ardent wish, He emerged as Man-Lion, right from inside a pillar and cleaved the haughty Hiraṇya's body into parts. In his present state of exultation, the Āḻvār drowns all his past miseries due to separation from the Lord, nor is he apprehensive of the dreadful prospect of yet another spell of separation from Him. The present enjoyment is so full and complete that it does not admit of brooding over the past desolation or dreading a gloomy future.

uru ākiya āṟu camayaṅkaṭku ellām
poru āki niṉṟāṉ avaṉ-ellāp poruṭkum
aru ākiya ātiyai, tēvarkaṭku ellām
karu ākiya kaṇṇaṉai, kaṇṭukoṇṭēṉē. (IX-4-8)

Translation

Perceive and enjoy do I Kaṇṇaṉ, the Primate,
The sole Sustainer of all lives, the Progenitor great,
Of the Devas, well beyond the mischief of the heresies
Of the six alien systems of philosophy.

Notes

(i) The omnipotent Lord can surely preserve Himself from the onslaught of the heretical doctrines like those of Cārvākas, Jains, Buddhists, Vaiśeṣikas, Śāṅkhyas and Pāśupadhas, denying His very existence. These systems do not admit the authority of the Vedas.

(ii) The Lord is the great Ordainer, being the first Cause of all things and the sole Sustainer of all souls, as their Internal Controller, residing in all things and beings.

(iii) The love-intoxicated Āḻvār could envisage Lord Kṛṣṇa, a by-gone Avatāra, as if he was a contemporary of His. The impious like Śiśupāla could not, however, perceive

the Lord in His true Form, even though the Lord, in His incarnate Form, was in their midst.

kaṇṭukoṇṭu, eṉ kaṇ-iṇai ārak kaḷittu,
paṇṭai viṉaiyāyiṉa paṟṟoṭu aṟuttu,
toṇṭarkku amutu uṇṇac col-mālaikaḷ coṉṉēṉ—
aṇṭattu amarar perumāṉ aṭiyēṉē. (IX–4–9)

Translation

Lustily do my eyes feast on the Form exquisite,
Of the Chief of the Celestials in Heaven, who did eradicate
My age-long ills and evils and made me His vassal;
Blessed am I to feed the devout with this nectarean hymnal.

Note

Not stopping with enjoying the Lord himself, the Āḷvār extends the delight to others around and to posterity through generations. Indeed, this confers on him a greater joy than that resulting from the severance of his age-long sins and the glorious vision of the Lord. Many indeed are the poets of this world but none has declared the intention in composing the poems, in the manner the Āḷvar has done, in this song. Tiruvāymoḷi has been graciously composed by the Saint in order to nourish the Lord's devotees with the nectarean sweetness of its contents. The opening word " Bhaktāmṛutam ", the ambrosia for God-lovers, in the opening invocatory śloka, composed by Śrīman Nāthamuni, is derived from this song, based on the Aḷvār's intention, as set out, in this song.

aṭiyāṉ ivaṉ eṉṟu eṉakku ār aruḷ ceyyum
neṭiyāṉai, niṟai pukaḻ am ciṟaip puḷḷiṉ
koṭiyāṉai, kuṉṟāmal ulakam aḷanta
aṭiyāṉai, aṭaintu aṭiyēṉ uyntavāṟē! (IX–4–10)

Translation

Oh, what a bliss this vassal has attained!
The Lord, who the worlds, with no exception, spanned,

On Whose banner is the bird, of large fame and lovely plumes,
Has lavished on me, as His vassal dear, His grace supreme.

Notes

(i) The Āḷvār proclaims with great joy that the Lord has lavished on him His grace galore, looking upon him as His vassal. Here is a suggestion that, although he is not a true servant as such of the Lord, He has deigned to look upon him as one and, on that score, lavished all His affections on him. Delving into the inner core of the meaning yielded by the original text of this song, Nampiḷḷai would say, the Lord's bounty, which is commensurate with His own greatness, is for His own delectation and does not, in the least, depend upon the stature of the recepient, high or low. Did not the Lord set His lovely pair of feet on one and all, without distinction of high or low, unasked and unsolicited, during His advent as Tṛvikrama?

(ii) It is noteworthy, in this context, that the subject fares better as the Lord's servant (vassal) than as His child. Whereas children inherit but a portion of the father's property, the servants become the sole objects of the master's strong affections. Further, the former is but a material gain whereas the latter is spiritual in its content. When Piḷḷai Akalaṅka Brahma Rāyar, the disciple of Kūrattāḷvāṉ, offended, unwittingly though, Parāśara Bhaṭṭar, the Guru's son, the latter left Srīraṅgam for Tirukkōṭṭiyūr. Rāyar naturally felt uneasy over this turn of events; in his great anxiety for conciliation with Bhaṭṭārya, Rāyar sought the good offices of one ' Irukai mata vāraṇaṉ ', an intimate servant of Bhaṭṭārya, for mediation and despatched him to Tirukkōṭṭiyūr on a peace-mission. With his coaxing eloquence and personal magnetism, the servant, a mere weaver, by caste, so very dear to Lord Raṅganātha and Bhaṭṭārya alike, brought about the change

of heart in Bhaṭṭārya who deigned to forgive Rāyar. When observers exlaimed that it is only an exemplary servant, who could accomplish such a difficult task, Bhaṭṭārya responded, saying that Vāraṇaṉ was, by his very nature, a born-servant, who could conquer all. So great is the efficacy of service and it is little wonder then that the Lord values it most and lavishes His affections on the devout servants.

āṟā matayāṉai aṭarttavaṉ-taṉṉai
cēṟu ār vayal teṉ kurukūrc caṭakōpaṉ
nūṟē coṉṉa ōrāyirattuḷ ip pattum
ēṟē tarum vāṉavar-tam iṉ uyirkkē. (IX-4-11)

Translation

These songs ten, out of the ten hundreds, sung by Caṭakōpaṉ,
Of Kurukūr with fields fertile, adoring the great one,
Who the elephant in perpetual must had slain,
Will lead the chanters, on to the Lord Supreme,
The chief of the Celestials, unto them very sweet.

Notes

(i) This decad is said to have the power to put the chanters on to the Supreme Lord, the beloved Chief of the 'Nityas' (Eternal Heroes in Heaven.

(ii) Even as the Lord slew the elephant in interminable must, He will destroy our sins of appalling magnitude.

(iii) The fields of Kurukūr provide its inhabitants with copious food while the Āḻvār, the great savant of the place, feeds sumptuously, the 'Mumukṣūs', the seekers of salvation, all over.

(iv) Even as every decad brings into focus a central topic or theme, every Centum stresses a particular aspect of God-head. See aphorism 215 of 'Ācārya Hṛdayam'.

Ninth Centum—Fifth Decad (IX-5)
(Iṉṉuyirc cēvalum)

Preamble

The Lord pulled the Āḻvār out of his erstwhile dejection, by reminding him of the great felicity, conferred by Him. This refers to the Āḻvār's great role in singing these hymns for the delectation of the devout. The Āḻvār also felt gratified that it was indeed a great gift of the loving Lord and this sustained the Āḻvār for the time being, as we saw in the last decad. But then, in the eighth song of that decad, the Āḻvār referred to his having got the vision of Lord Kṛṣṇa, a by-gone Avatāra (Incarnation). This led him on to the desire for external perception of the Lord as well, without being confined to a mere mental vision. It did not, however, materialise, as the Lord was intent upon rousing the Āḻvār's appetite for Him to still further heights, before He would eventually present Himself physically. Worn out by dejection, due to this seeming desertion by the Lord, the Āḻvār tried to divert his mind by seeking the fellowship of things around, bearing the Lord's likeness. But the very things, chosen for diversion, served only as incentives to remind the Āḻvār, all the more, about the Lord and thus torment him. The Āḻvār's sad predicament in IV-4 is worth recalling, in this context.

In his present love-smitten mood, the Āḻvār is like unto a female-lover, separated from the Lord after their erstwhile union, trying to sustain herself in the sweet environments of a lovely garden. But there, the warbling koel and the blue peacock remind the forlorn lover of the Lord's sweet accents and charming complexion and she at once concludes that the Lord has set these creatures on her, just to make her collapse, pining for Him. She, therefore, asks them why they are at such great pains to put an end to her life which she would as well part with, at her own volition. Even so, the Nāyakī manages to pull through, recounting, in this decad, the Lord's auspicious traits.

Here is an interesting anecdote, revealing how fascinating this decad was for Saint Rāmānuja. Once a misunderstanding arose between him and the temple minstrel-in-chief, Āḻvār Tiruvaraṅkapperumāḷ Araiyar, resulting in the Saint's discontinuance

of his visits to the Temple of Lord Raṅganātha at Srīraṅgam. The Araiyar, who was anxious to appease Rāmānuja, hit upon a special device whereby the Saint could be brought round and made to visit the temple. News was sent to the Saint that, on a certain day, this particular decad would be featured in the day's service at the temple. Rāmānuja promptly attended the service and peace between him and the Araiyar was thus restored. So great was the hold, this decad had on the Saint.

iṉ uyirc cēvalum nīrum kūvikkoṇṭu iṅku ettaṉai
eṉ uyir nōva miḻaṟṟēlmiṉ, kuyil-pēṭaikāl!
eṉ uyirk kaṇṇa-pirāṉai nīr varak kūvukilir;
eṉ uyir kūvik koṭuppārkkum ittaṉai vēṇṭumō? (IX–5–1)

Translation

Ye, female Koel-birds, do not my soul torment,
Cooing around here along with your mates dear;
Lord Kaṇṇan, dear unto me like life, You bid not
To come and meet me and yet, why are you in great flutter
To sap my life and unto Him hand it out?

Note

Seeing the female Koel-birds, in the company of their male counterparts, is enough to torment the forlorn lover, that Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī is. If, on the top of this, these birds, well-mated, start cooing their love-notes as well, it would indeed be the farthest limit of forbearance for the desolate Nāyakī. Well, it might be argued that it is not the fault of these birds that they keep cooing, being in their native element. But then, the Nāyakī's grievance is that these birds, given to cooing in sweet accents, did not oblige her by calling out her bosom Lord to come and join her. Verily, these birds are out to sap her life which the Nāyakī is prepared to give up of her own accord and she, therefore, feels that the birds need not make such a mighty effort, to accomplish their object. What they do is like applying heroic remedies for petty maladies, such as breaking an egg with a club.

ittaṉai vēṇṭuvatu aṉṟu-antō! aṉṟil-pēṭaikāḷ!
ettaṉai nīrum num cēvalum karaintu ēṅkutir?
vittakaṉ, kōvintaṉ, meyyaṉ allaṉ oruvarkkum;
attaṉai ām, iṉi eṉ uyir avaṉ kaiyatē. (IX–5–2)

Translation

Ye, Aṉṟil birds, is it at all meet
That you should with your male partners mate,
Right in front of me and warble my life out?
Alas! Kōvintaṉ, the mystic Lord isn't true to any one,
My life is in His keeping and help I need from none.

Note

The Koel-birds kept silent, in response to the Nāyakī's appeal. Meanwhile, the Krauñca (Aṉṟil) birds started warbling along with their inseparable male partners. The Nāyakī chides them, saying that neither the female nor the male is any better than the Koel-birds and wants to know why they are all out to kill her. The birds tried to beat back the Nāyakī's admonition by pointing out that she should not make all this fuss over her temporary separation from the Lord, seeing that He covets her company so much that He could not bear being away from her for long. In her present state of deep dejection, the Nāyakī is in no mood be believe that the Lord is most easily accessible unto the devout and beyond the reach of others. She reshapes the slogan and avers that He is true to none and is hardly the Universal Saviour, He is believed to be. And yet, He is so enigmatic that He can neither be clung to, as the Saviour nor be given up, as being antagonistic. Either way, her life is in His keeping and, therefore, she does not need the help of these birds or, for the matter of that, of any one else. Actually, the Lord's dispensation, in any form, is always welcome to His true devotees, who have realised their essential nature, as His exclusive vassals, solely dependent on Him. Lord Kṛṣṇa's proverbial mendacity is as wholesome to them as Lord Rāma's classical veracity, both being beneficial.

avaṉ kaiyatē eṉatu ār uyir, aṉṟil-pēṭaikāḷ!
evaṉ colli nīr kuṭaintu āṭutir puṭai cūḻavē?
tavam ceytillā viṉaiyāṭṭiyēṉ uyir iṅku uṇṭō–
evaṉ colli niṟṟum-num ēṅku kūkkural kēṭṭumē? (IX–5–3)

Translation

Know Ye not, Oh, female Aṉṟil birds,
My life is entirely in His hands;
Why do you unto your mates talk love
Within my hearing and pull poor me down?
My life is well on the point of ebbing out,
Alas! the felicity this sinner lacks of keeping it *intact*.
Can I at all subsist even after hearing your love-notes?

Note

The female Krauñca (Aṉṟil) birds, flirting with their males, present a picture entirely different from that of the Nāyakī, sunk deep in dejection. It is only when these birds tasted the bitter fruit of separation from their mates, they would realise the sad plight of the Nāyakī and sympathise with her. It is indeed much more than she can bear, these birds making merry, right in front of her. What is worse, unlike the Lord who wouldn't mind His separation from the Nāyakī, for a while, the Nāyakī has not been endowed with the capacity to put up with even such momentary desertion by her beloved Lord and remain complacent. The Nāyakī feels that her life is ebbing out and that these birds, warbling their love-notes, are hell-bent to take her life out, not knowing that her life is in His hands. Did not the Āḻvār observe, in IV-3-8, "Oh, Lord, You made my soul Yours and Yours mine"?

kūkkural kēṭṭum nam kaṇṇaṉ māyaṉ veḷippaṭāṉ;
mēl kiḷai koḷḷēlmiṉ, nīrum cēvalum, kōḻikāḷ!
vākkum, maṉamum, karumamum namakku āṅkatē;
ākkaiyum āviyum antaram niṉṟu uḻalumē. (IX–5–4)

Translation

Ye, parrots, even Your amorous shouts
Haven't unto me brought Kaṇṇaṉ, our mystic Lord,
Why then do you still coo so loud from that height?
My word, deed and thought are beside Him sheltered
But left in the lurch, my body and soul struggle a lot.

Note

The Nāyakī wonders why the amorous shouts of these merry birds, which could be heard all over, did not stir up her Lord's emotions, in the same way as she reacted. She admonishes the parrots not to warble any more, in such high pitch and torment her, seeing that their cooings had not evoked the Lord's response. The parrots would not, however, obey the Nāyakī and persisted in shouting. Apprehending that these birds were bent upon teasing her, the Nāyakī disclosed to them that her triple faculties of speech, thought and action had already fled over to the Lord and that the birds would, therefore, do well to shift their scene of activity to where her Lord was. The parrots could not swallow this statement of the Nāyakī, seeing that she was actually talking to them. The Nāyakī clarified that her body and soul were just tottering at this end and that she didn't exist, in the real sense.

antaram niṉṟu uḻalkiṉṟa yāṉuṭaip pūvaikāḷ!
num tiṟattu ētum iṭai illai, kuḻaṟēlmiṉō-
intira ñālaṅkaḷ kāṭṭi, iv ēḻ ulakum koṇṭa
nam tiru mārpaṉ nam āvi uṇṇa naṉku eṇṇiṉāṉ. (IX–5–5)

Translation

My pet Pūvai birds, You don't have to sing and torment me,
For the Lord, Who on His chest holds Tiru (Mahālakṣmī)
Has indeed planned well ahead to finish me off,
Even as He did the seven worlds get hold of,
Playing many a wily trick (on Mahā bali).

Note

The Nāyakī points out to her pet birds, the futility of their attempts to torment her, as she already stands tormented by her beloved Lord, well set on the path of ending her altogether. In her present state of discomfiture, the

Nāyakī puts some strange construction on the Lord bearing Mahālakṣmī, His principal Spouse, on His broad chest. This was just to lull the Nāyakī into a sense of false security, by an outward display of His connubial affections. Likewise, she lashes at the Lord, as a downright strategist who seized all the worlds from Mahābali, on the sly. Did He not extend false hopes to her of ever-lasting companionship, during His erstwhile union with her? If this was the ruse, set up by no less than the omni-potent Lord to finish off the Nāyaki, should He need the help of any one else and much less, the help of these tiny birds, to accomplish His task?

naṉku eṉṉi nāṉ vaḷartta ciṟu kiḷip paitalē!
iṉ kural nī miḻaṟṟēl; eṉ ār uyirk kākuttaṉ,
niṉ ceyya vāy okkum vāyaṉ, kaṇṇaṉ, kai kāliṉaṉ,
niṉ pacum cāma niṟattaṉ-kūṭṭuṇṭu nīṅkiṉāṉ. (IX-5-6)

Translation

Methought you would unto my aid come in times of need,
And so, my tiny little parrot, You I did lovingly tend;
Sing no more, in my presence, in your tone sweet and remind
Me of Kākuttaṉ, dear as life, of a complexion like yours,
Whose lips are like unto your beak red, whose eyes,
Hands and feet resemble yours, who was in my embrace locked
But has now from me fled, oh, how wicked!

Note

The young parrot, lovingly tended by the Nāyakī and taught by her to spell out the Lord's names, prattles the Lord's names in the Nāyakī's hearing. Poor little thing, it does not know that it hardly suits her, in her present state of mental agony due to her separation from the Lord. Actually, the Lord's names, mouthed by the faithful parrot, just pierce the Nāyaki, like sharp spears, as Nampiḷḷai would put it. The Nāyakī chides the parrot for inflicting such agony on her, like unto the young one attempting to kill the mother. It would, of course, be a different story altogether if the parrot performed likewise when the saint is in the blessed state of communion with the Lord.

kūṭṭuṇṭu nīṅkiya kōlat tāmaraik kaṇ cevvāy
vāṭṭam il eṉ karumāṇikkam, kaṇṇaṉ, māyaṉpōl
kōṭṭiya villoṭu miṉṉum mēkakkuḷaṅkaḷkāḷ!
kāṭṭelmiṉ num uru-eṉ uyirkku atu kālaṉē. (IX-5-7)

Translation

Ye bunches of clouds with lightning streaks that gleam
Like silvery bows, well bent! show me not your form,
Which unto my life is like Kālaṉ, the angel of Death, one dreads,
For you bear the likeness of Kaṇṇaṉ, my mystic Lord,
Who after His erstwhile union with me has fled,
Whose sapphire hue, lotus eyes and lips red
Are, however, in my thoughts for ever.

Notes

(i) When the silvery lightning cleaves the bosom of the dark clouds, one cannot but recollect the exquisite form of Lord Kṛṣṇa of Sapphire hue, bedecked with dazzling ornaments. The Nāyakī, therefore, asks the clouds not to present themselves to her, as it would prove fatal to her.

(ii) During their erstwhile union, when the Nāyakī and the Lord were locked in tight embrace, it looked as if they would never get parted. But then, the Lord deserted her and, in the process, He stood to gain. Already known for His exquisite charm, each one of His limbs. shone with even greater lustre after His union with the Nāyakī. On the other hand, the Nāyakī fared miserably. The Lord's desertion has affected her mind and body so much, that the bangles would not rest on her wrists, grown terribly thin, and her natural complexion has faded out alarmingly, decoloration having set in.

uyirkku atu kālaṉ eṉṟu, ummai yāṉ irantēṟku, nīr,
kuyil-paitalkāḷ! kaṇṇaṉ nāmamē kuḻaṟik koṉṟīr;
tayirp paḻañ cōṟṟoṭu pāl aṭiciḻum tantu, col
payiṟṟiya nal vaḷam ūṭṭiṉir!-paṇpu uṭaiyīrē! (IX-5-8)

Translation

Ye, young Koel-birds, I did entreat you not to utter
The name of Kaṇṇaṉ and put me in a flutter,
And yet, His name You spell and me You do slaughter;
Well, this is how you return my kindness, you I did feed
With curd and rice, cold and cooked with milk, I did also teach
How to utter the Lord's name; how nice of you indeed!

Note

In her present state of desolation, the Nāyakī is in no mood to listen to the Lord's name being chanted by any one and much less, her own pet birds, particularly, the name of Lord Kṛṣṇa. The Nāyakī reared up the birds with curd, rice and milk and taught them also how to utter the Lord's names, Rāma, Kṛṣṇa and so on. A little while ago, the Nāyakī had asked these birds not to utter the name of kṛṣṇa, so dear to her and yet, very bitter in her present state. The name of Rāma, the elixir of life, the Redeemer of even the dead was, however, permitted by her, as it would help to sustain her and pull through. The birds, however, pronounced only Kṛṣṇa's name, with a vengeance, the Nāyakī could hardly make out and it is this that she calls massacre, pure and simple. The Nāyakī naturally feels vexed that these birds, on whom she had lavished a lot of affection and attention, should now do her a bad turn.

paṇpu uṭai vaṇṭoṭu tumpikāḷ! paṇ miḻaṟṟēlmiṉ;
puṉ-purai vēl koṭu kuttāl okkum num iṉ kural—
taṉ peru nīrt taṭam tāmarai malarntāl okkum
kaṇ perum kaṇṇaṉ nam āvi uṇṭu, eḻa naṇṇiṉāṉ. (IX-5-9)

Translation

Ye, humming bees and beetles, Your tone, though sweet,
Is unto me agonising like the spear, driven into the wound straight,;
Right-minded that you are, You shall sing no more;

Of eyes, large and lovely, like the blooming lotus in the pond,
Kaṇṇaṉ, my Lord, did my life snatch and abscond.

Note

Fed well on the honey gathered from the flowers in bloom, the sonorous bees hum nicely and it would indeed be a treat to the Nāyakī if she were in the company of her beloved Lord. But now, He is not merely away from her but has also stolen away her heart, by exhibiting His exquisite charm, particularly, His large and lovely eyes like unto the lotus, in full-bloom, in a big pond full of cool water. The Nāyakī finds the humming of the bees quite agonising, in her present state, and appeals to their good sense to desist from humming.

eḻa naṇṇi, nāmum nam vāṉa nāṭaṉōtu oṉṟiṉōm—
paḻaṉa nal nāraik kuḻāṅkaḷkāḷ! payiṉṟu eṉ iṉi?
iḻai nalla ākkaiyum paiyavē puyakku aṟṟatu—
taḻai nalla iṉpam talaippeytu eṅkum taḻaikkavē. (IX-5-10)

Translation

Ye, herds of herons, roaming in water-logged fields,
There's no use your conspiring against me any more;
Joined have I my Lord in Heaven, having given up this abode,
This body with jewels bedecked will stay here no more,
May this land prosper and enjoy lasting happiness, all over!

Notes

(i) Seeing a band of herons moving about, the Nāyakī felt that they had assembled together just to hatch a conspiracy against her, with a view to ending her life. She, however, hastened to tell them that there was hardly any need for it, as she had already gained access to the high Heaven. Questioned by the herons as to how she could make such a daring statement, while still in this abode, the Nāyakī enlightens them by asserting that her soul had already ascended Heaven and what they were beholding was only her body which too would fall off, in a day or two.

(ii) The last line of this song has been interpreted in three different ways by the great Ācāryas: (*a*) According to Saint Yāmunācārya, the great souls, bound for Heaven, would bless, on the eve of their ascent, the people over here, with all joy and prosperity. The Āḻvār just followed in their footsteps, when he made this benedictory statement.

(*b*) Saint Rāmānujācārya, however, thought that the Āḻvār only wished that the worldlings should be spared all the miseries and vicissitudes, gone through by him, soaked in God-love. Ironically speaking, the Āḻvār wished the men of this world, all joy, by keeping their hands off God-love.

(*c*) Parāśara Bhaṭṭārya opined that the people around were moved to pity, on seeing the Āḻvār's sad plight and very much wished that the Lord be pleased to hasten his delivery. But the Āḻvār retorted and told them that they need not commiserate with him any more, as he was at the fag end of his heaven-ward journey, the consummation of his God-love being near at hand and wished them all joy.

iṉpam talaippeytu eṅkum taḻaitta pal ūḻikkut
taṉ pukaḻ ēttat taṉakku aruḷ ceyta māyaṉait
teṉ kurukūrc caṭākōpaṉ col āyirattuḷ ivai
oṉpatōṭu oṉṟukkum mūvulakum urukumē. (IX–5–11)

Translation

Listeners, in all three worlds, of these songs nine plus one,
Out of the thousand of Kurukūr Caṭakōpaṉ,
Adoring the Lord, Who the eternal bliss confers, pervading all over,
And did on him His grace sweet shower,
That he might His praise sing till the end of eternity,
Will surely thaw down, however hard-hearted they might be.

Note

It may be recalled that, in the end song of VI-8 also, the benefit accrued by dint of chanting that decad was said to be the acquisition of the rare virtue of melting tenderness of heart, making it thaw down like the minute sands in water springs. It is indeed the Lord's grace galore that enables His devotees to sing His inexhaustible glory for all time. Even among these ten songs, the tenth stands on a special footing and is of unique grandeur. That is why the text of this song refers to the ten stanzas, in this decad, as the sum of nine and one, bringing out the grandeur of one stanza vis-a-vis the other nine. In the first nine songs, we saw the Nāyakī struggling to sustain herself through her association with things and creatures bearing the Lord's likeness, while in the tenth, she felt as though life was extinct and what remained was the mere body, ready to fall off.

Ninth Centum—Sixth Decad (IX-6)
(Urukumāl nencam)

Preamble

In the tenth song of the last decad, the Āḻvār's declaration that he had joined his Lord in Heaven and that his physical frame, left behind, would also fall off in a day or two, might make one feel that it marked the end of his stay in this abobe. And yet, the Āḻvār remained inside the hollow of the sacred tamarind tree for quite some time and sang some more of these nectarean hymns. How and what indeed sustained him and kept him on, in this abode? Could it be that the Lord obliged him with His sweet vision and sustained him? No, He did not. It was only the Āḻvār's vivid, rather, absorbing recollection of the immensity of the Lord's love during their erstwhile union, experienced by him in VIII-7, that warmed him up. This is how the contemplation, in retrospect, of her uninterrupted and exclusive enjoyment of Lord Rāmā's sweet company and auspicious traits for twelve long years in the Palace at Ayodhyā, helped to sustain Sita, during her captivity in Lankā. Actually, it is the Supreme Lord, Who, as the Internal Controller, induced this kind of reminiscence and the resultant effervescence of love in the Āḻvār and got, out of him, the further songs of this illuminating hymnal. The illustrious Nampiḷḷai would explain the prolongation of the Āḻvār's stay in this abode even at this crucial stage, as follows:

(i) The Āḷvār having resolved, as it were, to sustain himself by singing a thousand hymns, as seen from the end-song of each decad, right from the beginning, the Lord is also keen that the Āḷvār keeps it up and helps him indirectly, by not snatching him away earlier;

(ii) The Lord's own eagerness to listen to these thousand songs, in their entirety; and

(iii) It is the great good fortune of the 'Samsāris', caught up in the vortex of worldly life, that the Āḷvār stays on and continues to feed them with these nectarean hymns.

It is evident that the Lord, enshrined in the pilgrim centre, called Tirukkāṭkarai (in Kerala), kindled in the Āḷvār this kind of reminiscence and made him revert to the mental state, as in VIII-7, seeing that this decad lauds the glory and greatness of that Deity.

urukumāl neñcam uyiriṉ paramaṉṟi;
perukumāl vēṭkaiyum; eṉ ceykēṉ toṇṭaṉēṉ—
teruvu ellām kāvi kamaḻ tirukkāṭkarai
maruviya māyaṉ-taṉ māyam niṉaitoṟē? (IX–6–1)

Translation

What can this doting vassal do, whose love knows no bounds
Unto the mystic Lord, Who in Tirukkāṭkarai resides lovingly,
Whose streets are perfumed with scarlet lily?
As I do His wondrous traits contemplate, my heart thaws down

Note

The Āḷvār wants to know how to stem the on-rush of his God-love and the resultant melting down of his heart, so as to remain steady and stable and enjoy the Lord at Tirukkāṭkarai. But this is next to impossible because he is overwhelmed by the Deity's extra-ordinary love and condescension. The heart is the principal functionary for enjoyment and if it gives way, no enjoyment would be possible, like unto the predicament of a man, launched into a river in spate, whose rubber raft starts leaking, right at the commencement. How can the poor little thing, the Āḷvār's soul, smaller

than a spec, contain his God-love, full and flooding? The streets of the pilgrim centre are full of fragrance all over, without distinction of main roads and by-roads and lanes and if this is the case with the exterior, what to say of the interior, the Sanctum where the Deity, the very embodiment of fragrance, 'Sarva gandaḥ' as the scriptures put it, stays!

niṉaitoṟum, collumtoṟum, neñcu iṭintu ukum;
viṉaikoḷ cīr pāṭilum, vēm eṉatu ār uyir;
cuṉaikoḷ pūñcōlait teṉ kāṭkarai eṉ appā!
niṉaikilēṉ nāṉ uṉakku āṭceyyum nīrmaiyē. (IX–6–2)

Translation

Oh, Sire, residing in Teṉkāṭkarai, with many a pond and orchard fine,
As I dote on Your traits auspicious that steal sway my sins,
My heart gives way and when to utter Your glory I begin,
Melts down my mind, my soul would with passion burn
If I your praise did sing, serve You I know not how I can.

Notes

The Lord's tender solicitude for the Āḷvār, His amazing simplicity and astounding love, exhibited in VIII-7, made it appear that the Āḷvār was His sole concern and He literally doted on him. In trying to recollect, in this decad, the extra-ordinary posture of the Lord, the Āḷvār only finds that he is attempting the impossible. His mind was not equal to the task, giving way right at the beginning, like unto the embankment of the river, swept off by the flood waters, leaving no trace of its former existence. Even when the mind is not active and virtually defunct, the tongue would utter the Lord's glory mechanically and these words, trickling down the ears to the region of the heart, would only corrode it still further and disintegrate it. How then could the Āḷvār think of serving the Lord, especially when he is struck dumb and insensate, ruminating over the Lord's erstwhile utterance unto him, "Thee, I shall serve", reversing the normal order of things?

nirmaiyāl neñcam vañcittup pukuntu, eṉṉai
irmaiceytu, eṉ uyir āy, eṉ uyir uṇṭāṉ;
cir malku cōlait teṉ kāṭkarai eṉ appaṉ,
kār mukil vaṇṇaṉ-taṉ kaḷvam aṟikilēṉ. (IX–6–3)

Translation

Methought the Lord got inside me, being my Master,
So as to sustain me, but what was really the matter?
Once inside, He caught me unawares and my mind did shatter
By His simplicity galore, wanting to serve me, His vassal;
The stealthy ways of the cloud-hued Lord, Who does dwell,
In Teṉkāṭkarai, amid lovely gardens, I can't tell.

Note

If only the Āḻvār had a prior knowledge of the Lord's intention to reverse the normal gear and serve him, His born vassal, he would not have allowed Him access to the interior of his heart. Having gained entry, the Lord displayed His amazing simplicity whereby He made the Āḻvār just melt down and dwindle. Having kindled God-love in the Āḻvār, the Lord just devoured him through His all-conquering love.

aṟikilēṉ-taṉṉuḷ aṉaittu ulakum niṟka,
neṟimaiyāl tāṉum avaṟṟuḷ niṟkum pirāṉ,
veṟi kamaḷ cōlait teṉ kāṭkarai eṉ appaṉ,
ciṟiya eṉ ār uyir uṇṭa tiru-aruḷē. (IX–6–4)

Translation

The Lord Supreme does all things and beings sustain
And in them all abides; it is beyond me to ascertain
Why my Sire dwelling in Teṉkāṭkarai, amid fragrant gardens,
Should on this petty soul deign to lavish His affections.

Note

It is indeed incredible that the Lord, higher than whom there is none, should pounce upon a frail being like the Āḻvār, with such avidity. As Nampiḷḷai would put it, the Āḻvār is at a loss to know whether the Lord did so out of love or He was out to kill him with His overwhelming kindness. The Lord just grabbed at the Āḻvār, saying that the latter, in his native humility, was not conscious of his greatness.

tiru-aruḷ ceypavaṉ pōla, eṉṉuḷ pukuntu,
uruvamum ār uyirum uṭaṉē uṇṭāṉ—
tiru vaḷar cōlait teṉ kāṭkarai eṉ appaṉ,
karu vaḷar mēṉi eṉ kaṇṇaṉ kaḷvaṅkaḷē! (IX–6–5)

Translation

How stealthy indeed are the ways of the dark-hued Lord!
Kaṇṇaṉ, my Sire, Who in Teṉkāṭkarai dwells amid lovely orchards,
Entered my heart as if to bestow on me His grace
And reclaim me, His vassal, but He did on me pounce,
My body foul and soul dear alike, with delight immense,

Note

The Lord sheds His grace, according to the Āḻvār, when He takes service from him, true to his essential nature. The Āḻvār welcomed the Lord's entry into the interior of his heart, thinking that it would help to sustain his basic stance, as His exclusive vassal from time immemorial. But what actually transpired sent him aghast. Prior to the dawn of true knowledge of his essential nature and his relationship unto the Lord, the Āḻvār mistook his body for the soul and lavished his affections on it (body). But the spiritually regenerated Āḻvār would hate it, as something foul, full of dirt, as set out in the opening song of his very first hymnal (Tiruviruttam). And yet, the Lord, in His unbounded love for the Āḻvār, took to his body also with great relish, making the Āḻvar look on Him with bewildering excitement.

eṉ kaṇṇaṉ kaḷvam eṉakkuc cemmāy niṟkum;
am kaṇṇaṉ uṇṭa eṉ ār uyirk kōtu itu;
puṉkaṇmai eyti, pulampi irāppakal
eṉ kaṇṇaṉ eṉṟu, avaṉ kāṭkarai ēttumē. (IX–6–6)

Translation

Guileless that I am, I fell an easy prey
To the wily overtures of Kaṇṇaṉ, my Lord,

My soul, by Him sapped, cries out His name, night and day,
And on Kāṭkarai meditates where He does reside.

Note

The Āḻvār, who points the accusing finger at the Lord and calls Him names while in a state of desolation due to separation from Him, sinks all such thoughts, rather, forgets all about them, when the Lord presents Himself before him. Here then is the tantalising charm of the Lord. The Āḻvār took Him at His face value and thoroughly enjoyed his erstwhile union with Him. But when the Lord withdrew Himself from the Āḻvār, the latter was consigned to the bottom-most depths of dejection and felt completely sapped. And yet, he would keep ruminating over His blandishments during their erstwhile union.

kāṭkarai ēttum; ataṉuḷ kaṇṇā! eṉṉum;
vēṭkai nōy kūra, niṉaintu, karaintu ukum;
āṭkoḷvāṉ ottu, en uyir uṇṭa māyaṉāl
kōḷ kuṟaipaṭṭatu-eṉ āṟ uyir kōḷ uṇṭē. (IX–6–7)

Translation

The wondrous Lord did my soul consume
After getting inside me, as if to make me His vassal,
And yet, what little remains of my soul does proclaim
The glory of Kāṭkarai and calls Him that therein dwells,
Oh, my Lord Kaṇṇā, love-sick, my soul dwindles
Recounting His ravishing love during our erstwhile union.

Note

Consumed by God-love, the Āḻvār feels that he has been fully consumed by God. Still, he keeps pining for Him and the pilgrim centre where He stands enshrined and this shows that a little bit of his partly eaten-up soul is still lingering. Wonder-struck and overwhelmed indeed is the Āḻvār, that the Omni-scient Lord should dote on a frail being, like him, in this manner.

kōḷ uṇṭāṉ aṉṟi vantu, eṉ uyir-tāṉ uṇṭāṉ;
nāḷum ṉāḷ vantu, eṉṉai muṟṟavum tāṉ uṇṭāṉ;
kāḷa nīr mēkat teṉ kāṭkarai eṉ appaṟku
āḷ aṉṟē paṭṭatu? eṉ ār uyir paṭṭatē! (IX–6–8)

Translation

There's indeed nothing I could unto the Lord offer
And yet, He did out of His voluntary grace enter
My soul and day by day consumed it, in full;
Should my cloud-hued Lord, Who does in Kāṭkarai dwell,
Afflict thus my soul, simply because I am His vassal?

Notes

(i) Even as the Āḻvār experiences the marvellous communications unfolded unto him from the Lord, an inexhaustible fountain of bliss, ever fresh, the Lord enjoys the Āḻvār with a similar feeling of reciprocity. The Āḻvār says:

(*a*) The Lord lavished His affections on the Āḻvār's soul, purely as a matter of spontaneous grace;

(*b*) The Lord enjoyed the Āḻvār with an avidity which gave one the impression that He had never before come across one, so delicious and

(*c*) The Lord got hold of the Āḻvār, out of His own free-will and sweet grace (Paragata Svīkāra), as distinguished from 'Svagata Svīkāra', (*i.e.*) the Āḻvār courting Him.

(ii) It might be questioned how the all-pervading Lord is said to have feasted on the Āḻvār's soul, smaller than a spec. What the Āḻvār emphasises here is the exuberance of the Lord's love unto the Āḻvār, which makes even his tiny little soul loom large in His eyes. It was just a frugal fare that Vidura provided for Lord Kṛṣṇa and Yet, He ate it with such great relish that it looked like a number of courses, as indicated by the plural phraseology, 'Vidurānnādhi', in the text.

(iii) What precisely does the Āḻvār refer to, when he says that his soul is afflicted ? It is sheer God-enjoyment, the rapturous contemplation of His auspicious attributes, transporting the Āḻvar to the realm of ecstasy, where one can hardly remain steady and stable. It is indeed a unique experience, very different from that of the ungodly, pitted against the Lord and smitten by His unrelenting arrows; the former is the region of the mind while the latter is purely physical.

ār uyir paṭṭatu, eṉatu uyir paṭṭatu—
pēr itaḻt tāmaraik kaṇ kaṉi vāyatu ōr
kār eḻil mēkat teṉ kāṭkarai kōyil koḷ
cīr eḻil nāl taṭam tōḷ teyvavārikkē? (IX–6–9)

Translation

Is there yet another soul like mine, smitten by love
Unto the Lord of charm exquisite, with shoulders four,
Lotus eyes, large and lovely, red lips and Form of beauty galore,
Like unto dark clouds lovely, a delectable ocean unto the gods above,
Who has in Teṉkāṭkarai, taken up His abode?

Note

To a question, supposed to have been put to the Āḻvār, as to whether all those engrossed with the Lord's attributes are not in the same plight as he and why he should make much ado about it, this is the Āḻvār's reply. He avers that even the 'Nitya Sūris' in Heaven, the Eternal Angels, known for their deep absorption in the Lord's auspicious traits and incessant communion with Him do not suffer from an infatuation of this kind. The Lord's delicious Form has brought on this devastation of the Āḻvār's soul, enthralled by His bewitching eyes and coral lips. The Lord is the ocean which gave birth to a host of things including the minor deities (Celestials).

vārikkoṇṭu uṉṉai viḻuṅkuvaṉ kāṇil eṉṟu
ārvu uṟṟa eṉṉai oḻiya, eṉṉil muṉṉam
pāri:tut tāṉ eṉṉai muṟṟap parukiṉāṉ;
kār okkum kāṭkarai appaṉ-kaṭiyaṉē. (IX–6–10)

Translation

Eager I was indeed to gather the Lord up and devour
If Him I could only behold but my cloud-hued Sire,
Ever alert, Who in Kāṭkarai has taken abode,
Did consume me, in full, going well ahead.

Note

It can be firmly asserted that this song is indeed the very cream of the entire hymnal, yielding, as it does, the grand thesis that attainment of the individual soul is the Lord's great gain. This incidentally sets at naught the oft-debated concept of the individual gaining the Lord and striving to that end. In the 'Song Celestial', Lord Kṛṣṇa said, in a tone of frustration, that the Saint who looked upon Him, as All-in-one, the great Redeemer and Sole Sustainer, was scarce indeed. The Lord was looking for one such but couldn't get hold of any. Barely six weeks after He went to the Celestium, Nammāḻvār, answering to this description, came into this world. The Āḻvār was consumed by God-love, too deep for words. But the Lord forestalled him, being ever alert and consumed him with His all-conquering love, proving more than a match for the Āḻvār. The Lord had indeed made herculean efforts to reclaim the Āḻvār and little wonder then, that He literally pounced upon him, after having kindled in him God-love of such great magnitude.

kaṭiyaṉāyk kañcaṉaik koṉṟa pirāṉ-taṉṉai
koṭi matiḷ teṉ kurukūrc caṭakōpaṉ col
vaṭivu amai āyirattu ip pattiṉāl caṉmam
muṭivu eyti nācam kāṇṭirkaḷ em kāṉalē. (IX–6–11)

Translation

These songs ten, out of the comely thousand of Kurukūr Caṭakōpaṉ,
Adoring the Benefactor great, Who to slay Kañcaṉ did hasten,

Will unto the chanters ensure the destruction
Of the mirage [of Samsāra] and halt the recurrence of birth.

Note

The chanters of this decad, it is claimed, will get the terrific cycle of birth and rebirth halted, by cutting out the bondage of Samsāra, the root-cause of the dreadful succession of lives. The family ties and sensual pleasures breed empty and worthless desires and running after them is just as futile and meaningless as trying to quench one's thirst, mistaking the mirage for a running brook.

Ninth Centum—Seventh Decad (IX-7)
(Em Kāṉal Akam)

Preamble

The Āḻvār sustained himself, in a way, by contemplating the Lord's auspicious traits, as in the last decad. In the process, he, however, developed a deep yearning for direct perception of the Lord. This led him on to send emissaries to the Lord to come down and grace him with His presence. And now, here is the last of the four decads in which messages were sent to the Lord by the Āḻvār, figuratively transformed as a forlorn female lover, the other three being I-4, VI-1 and VI-8. It may be recalled that the destinations of the messages sent to the Lord in the earlier decads, were the Milk-ocean, where the Lord stays in His 'Vyuha' form, the seat of creative activity, His incarnate forms and His transcendental Form in Heaven as well as His 'Antaryāmi' or hidden Form, as the Internal Controller. The traits of the Lord, which held out a special fascination to the Nāyakī, while sending those messages, were, Forgiveness, His creed or pledge to extend protection to His devotees and His feeling of oneness with His devotees (aikarasya) (*i.e.*) sense of identity with them and deep compassion. The message, as in this decad, is, however, addressed to the Lord in His 'Arca' (Iconic, worshippable) form, the special accent being on His enchanting beauty. Vide apborism 156 of 'Ācārya Hrudayam, Put briefly, the message in this decad, to be conveyed by the birds to the Lord, is: "Oh, Sire, enshrined as You are in Tirumūḻikkaḷam (a pilgrim centre in Kerala state), You seem to

have got completely absorbed in the company of Your consorts and proximate attendants, to the exclusion of poor Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī. Alas! the Nāyakī, enthralled by Your exquisite beauty, can hardly brook separation from You any longer. Please take note of this fact and hasten to her".

em kāṉal akam kaḻivāy irai tērntu, iṅku iṉitu amarum
ceṅkāla maṭa nārāy! tirumūḻikkaḷattu uṟaiyum
koṅku ār pūn tuḻāy muṭi em kuṭakkūttarkku eṉ tūtāy,
num kālkaḷ eṉ talaimēl keḻumiro, numarōṭē. (IX–7–1)

Translation

Ye, red-legged stork lovely, that loiters in our garden canal,
In search of food, may you go on an errand
To my Lord in Tirumūḻikkaḷam, the pot-dancer grand,
Wearing on His crown honey-studded tuḷaci garland
And my head bedeck, on your return,
With your (weary) legs, along with your kin.

Notes

(i) The birds, ostensibly employed by the Āḻvār to convey his message to the Lord at Tirumūḻikkaḷam, symbolise the great preceptors. This has been clearly brought out in this opening song where the Āḻvār wants the birds to place their legs on his head, which, if taken literally, would not make much sense. The invocation is, therefore, to the illustrious Ācāryas to shed their grace on the Āḻvār by placing their legs on his head. c.f. Tiruviruttam—54, where the Āḻvār sought the good offices of the bees to put him on to the impeccable lotus feet of the Lord of the Celestials. It is evident that the bees in question denote none but the competent preceptors, who ensure our attainment of the Lord.

(ii) *Our garden Canal*: Possessivity, that is, "My-ness", sense of ownership should, in general, be eschewed and yet, it is indeed wholesome and welcome, when it is invoked for the benefit of others, and not for one's own selfish ends. It is the Nāyakī's garden where the birds lovingly loiter and this link with them helps her to

commission them to carry her message to the Lord, by way of making Him aware of her parlous state. The birds are near at hand, in the Nāyakī's garden, instead of her having to go in search of them; this is indeed a great boon, comparable to Mahāpūrṇar, the preceptor of Śrī Rāmānuja, staying in the latter's house and imparting religious instructions.

(iii) *Storks with legs, red and lovely*: The storks denote the Ācāryas, as set out in (i) above, and it is but appropriate that their legs, the very haven of the disciple, are alluded to in such endearing terms.

numarōṭum piriyātē, nīrum num cēvalumāy
amar kātal kuruku iṉaṅkāḷ! aṇi mūḻikkaḷattu uṟaiyum,
emarālum paḻippuṇṭu, iṅku eṉ-tammāl iḻippuṇṭu?
tamarōṭu aṅku uṟaivārkkut takkilamē? kēḷīrē! (IX-7-2)

Translation

Ye, herds of herons, moving with your mates inseparable,
Better go and enquire of the Lord who dwells
In Tirumūḻikkaḷam, whether I, by Him despised,
And for that reason, by my kith and kin accused,
Won't be good company for those that on Him attend;
'Tis no use prolonging my agony, let me my life end.

Notes

(i) The Lord stays in Tirumūḻikkaḷam, attended upon by a large number of devotees and it is but natural that the Nāyakī also longs to be in such good company. Her emissaries, the birds, are also merry, enjoying connubial bliss, and moving about in their flocks and it is only appropriate that the Nāyakī invokes their aid to cure her of her solitude and restore her to the Lord's company in that glorious setting. Indeed, it behoves the affluent, far above wants, to feed the hungry and lift them from the pangs of hunger!

(ii) The Nāyakī feels that she is in an unenviable predicament and it would indeed be just as well that she ceased to

exist. The Lord and she had been locked up, in union, only to be deserted by Him. This gave her kith and kin the handle to give her up and so, she is neither here nor there. There is, of course, no reason why the Lord should give her up and she suspects that the Lord has just forgotten her, absorbed that He is in the sweet company of His devotees, gathered in that holy centre. The birds in question are now required to remind Him of the lonely existence of the Nāyakī, at this end and the imperative need for His admitting her also into His fold over there.

takkilamē? kēḷīrkaḷ-taṭam puṉalvāy irai tērum
kokku iṉaṅkāḷ! kuruku iṉaṅkāḷ! kuḻirmūḻikkaḷattu uṟaiyum
cekkamalattu alar pōlum kaṇ, kai, kāl, ceṅkaṉi vāy—
ak kamalattu ilai pōlum tirumēṉi-aṭikaḷukkē. (IX-7-3)

Translation

Ye, flocks of cranes and herons, your food you seek
In the big ponds over here, better go to cool Mūḻikkaḷam and ask
The Lord whose eyes, hands and feet and the red lotus are alike,
Whose lips are like a red fruit and whose complexion does match
The lotus leaf, whether unto Him I won't be a match.

Notes

(i) In each of the four decads, where the Nāyakī despatched messages to her Lord, there is one song, considered to be the very cream of that decad. And now, here is the topical song of this decad. Apprehending that the Lord is totally absorbed in the sweet company of the devotees surrounding Him at Tirumūḻikkaḷam, forgetting all about the Nāyakī, she now wants these birds to remind Him of how she got enthralled by His exquisite charm, reducing her to her present state. The Lord would seem to be oblivious of His own enthralling beauty which had brought on the Nāyakī's infatuation to such a high pitch that she can't brook

separation from Him, any longer. So then, the Nāyakī deems it fit to remind the Lord, through these birds, of His own ravishing beauty and the magic spell it has cast on the Nāyakī, in particular. It is this special feature that characterises this decad. See also the preamble to this decad, where it has been set out that the Lord's enchanting charm, in His iconic Form, is the source of inspiration for the Nāyakī's message conveyed through these birds.

(ii) The Nāyakī, according to Nampiḷḷai, wants these birds to ascertain from the Lord whether He has at all any fascination for her. If the reply be in the affirmative, she would try her best to hold on to her life; if otherwise, she would seek some means to put an end to her life, even as Sītā, in captivity, made a desperate bid to strangle herself with her long locks.

(iii) The Lord's complexion is compared to the lotus leaf. See also the Śloka in Rāmāyaṇa which affirms this: 'tam padmadala patrākṣam'. The word 'akṣam'. refers both to the eye and the body, the former is compaable to the lotus petals and the latter to the lotus leaf.

tirumēṉi aṭikaḷukkut tīviṉaiyēṉ viṭu tūtāy,
tirumūḻikkaḷam eṉṉum ceḻu nakarvāy aṇi mukilkāḷ!
tirumēṉi avaṭku aruḷīr eṉṟakkāl, ummait taṉ
tirumēṉi oḷi akaṟṟi, teḷi vicumpu kaṭiyumē? (IX–7–4)

Translation

Ye, pretty clouds, were you to run an errand
On behalf of this sinner unto my Master of form grand,
Who does in holy Tirumūḻikkaḷam dwell
And a word unto Him tell
That He should unto me offer His body gracious,
Do you fear that you He would punish,
Put you off colour and out of the clear sky push?

Notes

(i) *My Master of form grand*: His auspicious traits and wondrous deeds apart, the Lord's enchanting Form is

such as to enthral one and all, including the ungodly. Duryodhan and his men were studiously determined not to get up from their seats and extend any courtesy whatsoever to Lord Kṛṣṇa when He arrived at the royal court, as the errand boy of the Pāṇḍavās. But, as soon as the Lord entered the court, all of them, including the deadly Duryodhan, stood up automatically, entranced by the unique halo and splendour of His enchanting Form.

(ii) Sinner though, the Nāyakī deems it her great good fortune to fall at the feet of these birds, the Lord's devotees and to beg of them to tell the Lord in Tirumūḻikkaḷam, "Here is the Nāyakī languishing for you inside the hollow of the holy tamarind tree at Āḻvār Tirunakari." She exhorts the clouds not to apprehend any punisment for this, at the hands of the Lord, by way of pushing them out of the clear sky and depriving them of their lovely hue. On the other hand, the Lord will impart to them still greater lustre.

teḷi vicumpu kaṭitu ōṭi, ti vaḷaittu, miṉ ilakum
oḷi mukilkāḷ! tirumūḻikkaḷattu uṟaiyum eṉcuṭarkku,
teḷi vicumpu tirunāṭāt tīviṉaiyēṉ maṉattu uṟaiyum
tuḷi vār kaḷ kuḻalārkku, eṉ tūtu uraittal ceppumiṉē. (IX–7–5)

Translation

Ye, lovely clouds, speeding across the immaculate sky,
Holding in your bosom, lightning like unto the arc firy!
Convey my message, will you unto the Lord resplendent,
Who is in Tirumūḻikkaḷam resident,
Whose locks shed honey in plenty and Who in this sinner's heart dwells
With all the affection He bestows on the heaven impeccable.

Notes

(i) Seeing that the clouds were rather diffident of being heard by the Lord, the Nāyakī assures them of positive response by the Lord. The Nāyakī's confidence stemmed

from the fact that the Lord got Himself lodged in her heart with all the affection He bestows on His transcendent abode, called Heaven.

(ii) The lightning appears in the clouds only when they are about to rain. The rain clouds, referred to, in this song, however, denote the great preceptors, resplendent like the Lord Himself, showering knowledge on the disciples, all over.

(iii) *This Sinner's heart*: The sin, alluded to, is the Nāyakī's inability to envision the Lord, although He is very much in her heart. One Ciṟṟāḷkoṇṭāṉ would say: "It is indeed a long distance between the actual realisation of God and the mere inward mental conception of the Lord. To aspire for the former, right when God-love blooms in one's heart, is like opening a cloth-shop and announcing to the public that clothes are ready for sale while the cotton for these clothes is still lying raw in its pods on the tree." [As the Englishman would put it this is like attempting to sell the lion-skin even before the lion is hunted].

(iv) *Convey my message*: The message from one, on whose locks the flower has dried down to a mere shred, to Him whose, locks are bedecked with flowers, shedding honey profusely.

tūtu uraittal ceppumiṉkaḷ-tū moḻi vāy vaṇṭu iṉaṅkāḷ!
pōtu iraittu, matu nukarum poḻil mūḻikkaḷattu uṟaiyum
mātarait tam mārvakattē vaittārkku eṉ vāy-māṟṟam
tūtu uraittal cepputirēl, cuṭar vaḷaiyum kalaiyumē (IX-7-6)

Translation

Ye, sweet-sounding bees, if you would unto my Lord fly down,
Who the Divine Mother bears on His winsome chest and goes gay,
Residing in Tirumūḻikkaḷam, full of flower gardens,

Shedding honey in plenty and unto Him my oral message convey,
My saree and bangles I shall indeed regain.

Notes

(i) The *Sweet-sounding* bees typify the Ācāryas who can win over the Lord through their *persuasive eloquence*.

(ii) The Nāyakī does not even want the bees to come back and tell her what the Lord has to say in reply to her message. It would indeed be sufficient if they just conveyed her message to the Lord who is her avowed Saviour, pledged to protect her. What is even more assuring to the Nāyakī is the effective intercession and purposeful pleading of Śrī Mahālakṣmī, on behalf of the Nāyakī. All that the bees have got to do is to go to Tirumūḻikkaḷam, where the flower gardens yield plenty of food (honey) for them and incidentally tell the Lord about her in the immediate presence of Lakṣmī. In that propitious setting, the Nāyakī is quite sanguine of the result, namely, the restoration of the Lord to her and that would mean, she will, once again, don her saree all right and the bangles will also rest well on her wrist.

cuṭar vaḷaiyum kalaiyum koṇṭu, aruviṉaiyēṉ tōḷ tuṟanta
paṭar pukaḻāṉ, tirumūḻikkaḷattu uṟaiyum paṅkayakkaṇ
cuṭar pavaḷa vāyaṉaik kaṇṭu, orunāḷ ōr tūy māṟṟam
paṭar poḻilvāyk kuruku iṉaṅkāḷ! eṉakku oṉṟu paṇiyīrē.
(IX-7-7)

Translation

Ye, Koel birds that in this spacious garden dwell,
For my sake, a good word you have one day to tell
Unto my lotus-eyed Lord, with lovely lips like the coral red,
Of wide-spread fame, Who does in Tirumūḻikkaḷam reside,
Who this fell sinner's shoulders deserted,
Taking away my beaming bangles and saree as well.

Note

The Nāyakī, in her present state of separation after the erstwhile union with her Lord, is literally denuded of her feminity

which the bangles and saree denote. She wants these birds to go and tell the enchanting Lord at Tirumūḻikkaḷam that it was next to impossible for her to be apart from Him, of exquisite beauty, having tasted the bliss earlier.

eṉakku oṉṟu paṇiyīrkaḷ-irum poḻilvāy irai tērntu,
maṉakku iṉpam paṭa mēvum vaṇṭiṉaṅkāḷ! tumpikāḷ!
kaṉakkoḷ tiṇ matiḷ puṭai cūḻ tirumūḻikkaḷattu uṟaiyum
puṉakkoḷ kāyā mēṉip pūn tuḷāy muṭiyārkkē. (IX-7-8)

Translation

Ye, bees and beetles, moving in pleasant company
In these spacious gardens, in search of honey,
For me put in a word unto my Lord, sporting tuḷaci lovely
On His crown, of the complexion of the blue lily,
Who does in Tirumūḻikkaḷam dwell,
Surrounded by walls, tough and tall.

Note

The Nāyakī says, there is no use of these bees and beetles making merry in the company of their mates, gathering honey, without making her also happy. She, therefore, beckons them to go and tell the Lord in that holy centre, well fortified, how she longs to behold His exquisite Form. Here, at this end, the Nāyakī is in a precarious condition, while, at the other end, the Lord stands pledged to redeem the devout seeking His protection.

pūn tuḷāy muṭiyārkku, poṉ āḻik kaiyārukku,
ēntu nīr iḷam kurukē! tirumūḻik kaḷattārukku,
ēntu pūṇ mulai payantu, eṉ iṇai malark kaṇ nīr tatumpa,
tām tammaikkoṇṭu akaltal takavu aṉṟu eṉṟu uraiyīṟē.
(IX-7-9)

Translation

Ye, tiny heron, strutting gaily in the waters, go and tell
Unto my Lord who does in Tirumūḻikkaḷam dwell,
Holding the discus lovely and sporting tuḷaci on His crown
'Tis hardly fair that He should have from me gone,

Taking His body along, making my flowery eyes water down
And my breasts bedecked, lose their lustre fine.

Note

The Nāyakī is so much obsessed with the Lord's exquisite charm that she feels, it was hardly fair of Him to have got away from her, after their erstwhile union, without leaving His body behind! Ludicrous it might seem but it goes to convey that the Nāyakī just cannot bear being apart from the Lord, even for a split second.

takavu aṉṟu eṉṟu uraiyīrkaḷ-taṭam puṉalvāy irai tērntu,
mika iṉpam paṭa mēvum melnaṭaiya aṉṉaṅkāḷ!
mika mēṉi melivu eyti, mēkalaiyum īṭu aḻintu, eṉ
akamēṉi oḻiyāmē, tirumūḻikkaḷattārkkē. (IX-7-10)

Translation

Ye, swans of gentle gait, moving along merrily in fields fertile,
In search of food, unto the Lord in Tirumūḻikkaḷam go and tell,
'Tis hardly fair that He should despise me; only then,
My body, the saree thereon and my inner soul I can retain.

Note

The great Ācāryas, who go about delving and gathering the most delicious meanings, the scriptural texts can possibly yield, are referred to here, as the swans, endowed with the special faculty of picking up milk from a mixture of milk and water. The Nāyakī's appeal to the Lord's special trait of mercy is bound to go home to Him, as He cannot afford to risk His reputation, as the All-merciful. No doubt, the Lord's infinite mercy can never be exhausted even as the oceanic waters can never go dry. And yet, what is now sought to be pointed out by the Nāyakī is that His keeping aloof of her is by-no-means consistent with His great quality of mercy and cannot be deemed to be a happy trend, in this context.

oḻivu iṉṟi tirumūḻikkaḷattu uṟaiyum oṉcuṭarai
oḻivu illā aṇi maḻalaik kiḷimoḻiyāḷ alaṟṟiya col
vaḻu illā vaṇ kurukūrc caṭakōpaṉ vāyntu uraitta
aḻivu illā āyirattu ip pattum nōy aṟukkumē. (IX-7-11)

Translation

These songs ten, out of the eternal thousand, uttered by Caṭakōpaṉ,
Of Kurukūr, soaked in God-love impeccable,
Voicing forth the sweet-tongued Nāyakī's pangs of separation
From the resplendent Lord Who does, for ever, in Tirumūḻikkaḷam dwell,
Will the fell malady, the bondage of samsāra dispel.

Note

This decad will cut out the bondage of its chanters, the worldly ties, which operate as an impediment to the attainment of God-head. In other words, this decad cures the malady of separation from the Lord and the resultant state of desolation.

The resplendent Lord, in His iconic manifestation in Tirumūḻikkaḷam, is the Doctor who stays on permanently in our midst, determined to cure the malady of 'samsāra' of the devout seekers.

Ninth Centum—Eighth Decad (IX-8)
(Aṟukkum vinaiyāyiṉa)

Preamble

In the last decad, the Saint despatched several messengers to the Lord at Tirumūḻikkaḷam and yet, he could hardly contain the effervescence of God-love in him. He could not patiently await the return of the emissaries from the Lord and so, he tried to sustain himself by meeting the Lord enshrined in Tirunāvāy (another pilgrim centre in Kerala State, the number of such pilgrim centres in that State adding up to thirteen.) But, in his present state of desolation and debility, he could not make the trip to that pilgrim centre. The next best he could do was, therefore, to meditate on the Lord at Tirunāvāy, right from where he was. This is precisely what he does, in this decad. As Nampiḷḷai puts it, the Āḻvār was now in the same mental state as Sītā was, during the period intervening Hanumān's visit to her in Aśokavana and her eventual restoration to Lord Rāma.

aṟukkum viṉaiyāyiṉa-ākattu avaṉai
niṟuttum maṉattu oṉṟiya cintaiyiṉārkku;
verit taṇ malarc cōlaikaḷ cūḻ tirunāvāy
kuṟukkum vakai uṇṭukolō-koṭiyēṟkē? (IX-8-1)

Translation

Can this fell sinner by any means draw near
Tirunāvāy, full of flower gardens, cool and fragrant,
Which roots out the ills of those, greatly intent
On retaining the Lord, [that great Nectar],
In their minds, with devotion unique?

Notes

(i) The Āḻvār wants to know the means by which he could abridge the distance between him and the pilgrim centre, called Tirunāvāy.

(ii) The ills, referred to here, are of three distinct types, namely, (i) those which obstruct the path of knowledge of the essential nature of the individual soul (Svarūpa virodhi); (ii) those, which stand in the way of practising the means for attaining salvation (e.g.) not beseeching His redemptive grace but pinning all faith on one's own self and resorting to self-protection (Upāya virodhi) and (iii) those, which hinder the final bliss in the yonder state (e.g.) rendering service unto the Lord in the final state in Heaven, with the egoistic tinge of self-enjoyment, without resigning, *in toto*, to His grace and pleasure (Upeya virodhi). Even if this Pilgrim Centre did not cut out all these ills and evils, it was by itself a very attractive place from which one could hardly lift one's mind.

koṭi ēr iṭaik kōkaṉakattavaḷ kēḷvaṉ,
vaṭi vēl taṭam kaṇ maṭap piṉṉai maṇāḷaṉ,
neṭiyāṉ uṟai cōḻaikaḷ cūḻ tirunāvāy
aṭiyēṉ aṇukapperum nāḷ evaikolō? (IX-8-2)

Translation

When shall this vassal gain access to Tirunāvāy amid orchards fine,
Where dwells the Lord Supreme, the Consort Divine
Of lovely Piṉṉai, with large eyes like unto a spear,
The favourite of (Lakṣmī,) the lotus-born with waist akin to a creeper?

Note

Here are two great intercessors of proven efficiency, Lakṣmī, the thin-waisted and Nappiṉṉai, with lovely eyes, the two Divine Spouses in the Lord's immediate presence. No wonder then, the Āḻvār is eager to drive home the advantage and gain access to the Lord, in this highly propitious setting.

evaikol aṉukap perum nāḷ eṉṟu, eppōtum,
kavaiyil maṉam iṉṟi, kaṇṇīrkaḷ kaluḷvaṉ;
navai il tirunāraṇaṉ cēr tirunāvāy
avaiyuḷ pukalāvatu ōr nāḷ aṟiyēṉē. (IX–8–3)

Translation

With a mind unto Him solely rivetted
And tears rolling down my eyes, I do await
The day I'd gain access to Tirunāraṇaṉ, the immaculate,
In that assembly grand at Tirunāvāy the day appropriate,
When I shall that gathering enter, I know not.

Note

"Which is that day when I shall join the august assembly, presided over by Lord Srīman Nārāyaṇa, at Tirunāvāy?" the Āḻvār revolves in his mind, with single-minded devotion, tears flooding his eyes. Should he forego this supreme advantage, even when the Lord has deigned to make Himself visible and stay near at hand, in Tirunāvāy?

nāḷēl aṟiyēṉ eṉakku uḷḷaṉa; nāṉum
miḷā aṭimaippaṇi ceyyap pukuntēṉ;
nīḷ ār malarc cōlaikaḷ cūḻ tirunāvāy
vāḷ ēy taṭam kaṇ maṭap piṉṉai maṇāḷā! (IX–8–4)

Translation

Oh, dear Consort of Piṉṉai, with large eyes, spear-like,
Unto you, staying in Tirunāvāy, amid flower gardens grand
This vassal longs to render service without break,
I know not, however, when you will my desire grant.

Notes

The Āḻvār longs to render service unto the Lord, all the time, even as the 'Nitya Sūris', the Eternal Heroes in Heaven do. In near-by Tirunāvāy, the Lord stays in the coveted company of Goddess Nappiṉṉai, amid gardens yielding plenty of fragrant flowers for the worship of the Divine Couple. And yet, the Āḻvār knows not how long he will have to languish without rendering the Divine Service, longed for by him, and when exactly the Lord will enlist him in His service.

There are frequent references, in this decad, to the Divine Mother. Nampiḷḷai's admirable elucidation of this position is as follows:

"The sojourner, who is heading towards his home town, after years of wandering, keeps thinking of his mother and kith and kin, quite often. Even so, the Āḻvār, who is nearing the end of his journey to Heaven, the Eternal Land, keeps ruminating over the Divine Mother and the grand assembly of devotees over there."

maṇāḷaṉ, malar maṅkaikkum maṇmaṭantaikkum;
kaṇṇāḷaṉ ulakattu uyir, tēvarkaṭku ellām;
viṇṇāḷaṉ virumpi uṟaiyum tirunāvāy
kaṇ ārak kaḷikkiṉṟatu iṅku eṉṟukol, kaṇṭē? (IX–8–5)

Translation

When indeed shall I my eyes feast, right here,
On the Lord Supreme, Who in Tirunāvāy lovingly stays,
The Spouse of (Lakṣmī) the lotus-born and Mother Earth,
The Ordainer of Heaven and Earth, Who in Heaven holds sway?

Note

The Lord, Who holds durbar in Heaven, seated on His serpent couch, in the grand assembly of the Celestials, has come down to Tirunāvāy and made it His abode with great delight. The Āḷvār longs to behold the Lord in Tirunāvāy, all the time, feasting his eyes on His nectarean charm.

kaṇṭē kaḷikkiṉṟatu iṅku eṉṟukol kaṇkaḷ—
toṇṭē uṉakkāy oḻintēṉ, turicu iṉṟi;
vaṇṭu ār malarc cōlaikaḷ cūḻ tirunāvāy
koṇṭē uṟaikiṉṟa em kōvalar kōvē? (IX-8-6)

Translation

Oh, Chief of Cowherds, my Lord, You do lovingly stay
In Tirunāvāy, full of flower gardens, where bees go gay,
When shall I, Your selfless vassal, feast my eyes indeed
On Your Form exquisite, here, in this holy land?

Note

" Let the hunger of my eyes be appeased even if mine is not ", says the Āḷvār, who longs for the Lord's presence, with such great intensity. The Āḷvār is the blemishless vassal of the Lord, catering solely to His delight, without the slightest tinge of selfishness and he is thus a legitimate aspirant, the worthy recipient of the bliss in question.

kō ākiya māvaliyai nilam koṇṭāy!
tēvācuram ceṟṟavaṉē! tirumālē!
nāvāy uṟaikiṉṟa eṉ nāraṇa nampi!
āā! aṭiyāṉ ivaṉ eṉṟu aruḷāyē. (IX-8-7)

Translation

Nāraṇaṉ, my Benefactor great, Who in Nāvāy dwells,
Oh, Tirumāl, Who did the Asuras quell
In their fray with Devas! You did from Māvali beg
And wrest the land whereof he thought he was the master big;

" Ha! here is My vassal ", you should cognise
And on me bestow your grace spontaneous.

Note

'Tirumāl' denotes the Lord in conjunction with Srī Mahā Lakṣmī, highly conducive to the protection of the devout, routing their enemies and other impediments in the way of their attainment of God. It is against this favourable background that the Āḷvār beseeches the Lord's grace. The Lord had installed Indrā, as the Sovereign Lord of all the three worlds but Mahā Bali seized them from Indrā by force and proclaimed himself the master. Lord Mahā Viṣṇu set matters right, dexterously, by exploiting Bali's avowed munificence.

aruḷātu oḻivāy; aruḷceytu, aṭiyēṉaip
poruḷākki, uṉ poṉ aṭik kīḻp puka vaippāy—
maruḷē iṉṟi, uṉṉai eṉ neñcattu iruttum
teruḷē taru teṉ tirunāvāy eṉ tēvē! (IX-8-8)

Translation

My Sire, in Tirunāvāy enshrined, grant me wisdom clear
To lodge You firmly in my heart, with no inkling whatever
Of nescience in me, albeit You shed not Your grace on me
Nor deign to shelter me under Your feet lovely.

Note

Right at the beginning of this hymnal, it was elucidated that the Āḷvār was endowed by the Lord Himself, with clear-cut knowledge, full and complete, shorn of all discrepancies and deviations, doubt and despair. What is now prayed for is preservation of the clarity, already endowed, rather its stabilisation. Be he near or far from Him physically, mental proximity with the Lord, at all times and under all circumstances, is prayed for by the Āḷvār. While this is the interpretation of this song, by all the other glossators, Piḷḷāṉ has held this song to mean:

"My Lord, in the exercise of your sweet, spontaneous grace, you rid me of nescience, *in toto*, and dowered on me full and complete knowledge about your greatness and grandeur. It is, again, purely a matter of your grace, either way, whether or not you shelter me under your lovely feet, in due recognition of the fact that here I am, your vassal, intent upon rendering self-less service unto you".

tēvar muṉivarkku eṉṟum kāṇṭaṟku ariyaṉ;
mūvar mutalvaṉ; oru mūvulaku āḷi;
tēvaṉ virumpi uṟaiyum tirunāvāy
yāvar aṇukap peṟuvār iṉi?-antō! (IX-8-9)

Translation

Alas! after I am dead and gone
Who shall be the lucky one
Who can unto Tirunāvāy access gain,
Where stays lovingly the Lord Supreme Who does ordain
All the worlds and Piramaṉ, Civaṉ and Intiraṉ sustain,
Whom the sages and Celestials cannot without His grace attain?

Note

The Āḷvār wonders who indeed shall be lucky to achieve his ambition of enjoying, at close quarters, the lovely Lord at Tirunāvāy, once he gave up his body without realising it. Going to Tirunāvāy should not be taken literally and it should not be questioned what precludes one from reaching it. What the Saint actually aspires for is the Eternal Land (Heaven), the transcendent abode of the Lord, enshrined in Tirunāvāy, the first and foremost, the great ordainer of the worlds and the exalted Celestials.

antō! aṇukap perum nāḷ eṉṟu, eppōtum
cintai kalaṅkit tirumāl! eṉṟu aḻaippaṉ;
kontu ār malarc cōlaikaḷ cūḻ tirunāvāy
vantē uṟaikiṉṟa em mā maṇi vaṇṇā! (IX-8-10)

Translation

My Lord of sapphire hue! You left Your heavenly abode
And came down to Tirunāvāy, full of gardens where grow
Flowers in bunches fine; with a mind agitated, I do call,
Oh, Tirumāl, all the time, alas! will I join you at all?

Note

It is a love-intoxicated mind that gets agitated and, therefore, lacks clarity; it persists in calling Him repeatedly, even when there is no response from the other end, like unto the children, in their great ardour, calling their parents even when they are not near at hand. This is accentuated by the fact that the Lord has condescended to come and stay nearby, in Tirunāvāy, in all His heavenly splendour.

vaṇṇam maṇi māṭa nal nāvāy uḷḷāṉait
tiṇṇam matiḷ teṉ kurukūrc caṭakōpaṉ
paṇ ār tamiḻ āyirattu ip pattum vallār
maṇ āṇṭu maṇam kamaḻvar mallikaiyē. (IX-8-11)

Translation

Those well-versed in these songs ten, out of the tuneful thousand,
Composed by Caṭakōpaṉ of Kurukūr, by stately walls bound,
Adoring the Lord in lovely Tirunāvāy, with castles fine,
Shall rule this Earth long and then Heaven attain,
Imbibing the fragrance sweet of the Lord Supreme.

Note

The chanters of this decad shall enjoy the best of both the worlds. The text of the song, as in the original, affirms that these persons will not only rule over this world for long but also acquire the fragrance of Jasmine which, in fact, stands for perfumes, in general. The Scriptural texts declare that the Lord is the embodiment of all kinds of fragrance and it would, therefore, follow that the chanters in question shall imbibe all that fragrance, staying in Heaven, in close proximity to the Lord.

Ninth Centum—Ninth Decad (IX-9)
(Mallikai Kamal)

Preamble

Our great preceptors used to call this decad, as the 'Evening brawl' and the third decad in the next (tenth) centum, as the 'Morning squabble'. In the latter decad, the Āḻvār enters the vein of the Gopīs, the damsels of Virundāvaṉ, who quarrelled with Kṛṣṇa early in the morning when he was about to take the cattle to the pastures for grazing, dissuading him from going to the outlying fields, in view of their inability to brook separation from him for a whole day, not to speak of the lurking danger from Kamsa's spies and evil agents. In this decad, the Āḻvār experiences the pangs of separation, undergone by the Gopīs during those evenings, when Kṛṣṇa was a little late in returning home after tending the grazing cattle, by day. On certain evenings, Kṛṣṇa would return at the head of the cattle, sounding the bugle, while, on other days, He would allow the cattle to go ahead and walk behind them. Well, during those evenings, when Kṛṣṇa did not make His appearance first but chose to walk behind the cattle, even that little prolongation of Kṛṣṇa's absence upset the Gopīs who suffered the anguish of an age. The Āḻvār is found in this decad, experiencing, singly, the pangs experienced by all of them in the above context.

It is evening when the cool southerly breeze wafts the sweet fragrance of the Jasmine, in full bloom and the lovely Moon is up in the Sky. Then there is the roaring of the sea, the tuneful cooing of the warbling birds, the distant sound of the bugle and a host of other things which make that part of the day highly delectable. But all these normal instruments of happiness affect the frustrated Āḻvār adversely, as he could not gain access to Tirunāvāy, much as he longed for. All these remind him of the Lord, making his separation from Him, all the more poignant. A striking parallel to this can be found in Sītā during her captivity in Laṅkā, surrounded by an uncouth band of Rākṣasīs, tormenting and torturing her. What was it she had longed for while following Lord Rāma into exile and what was it she got herself landed in? Well, She thought that she could have her Lord all unto herself, without the distractions of the Palace where he would have had to divide

his time among so many parents, subjects, ministers and so on. But she found herself in the gruesome predicament of a captive on whom miseries of all kinds were unleashed by those unrelenting monsters, set upon her by Rāvaṇa, their king. She was even driven to the very edge of the extreme step of strangling herself with her long locks of hair.

Nampi Tiruvaraṅka Nārāyaṇa Tācar, a disciple of Nampiḷḷai attended the latter's discourses of Tiruvāymoḻi. One day, Tācar happened to meet Peṟṟi, a disciple of Nañcīyar, the preceptor of Nampiḷḷai. Asked about the particular decad, currently discoursed upon delightfully by Nampiḷḷai, Tācar told Peṟṟi, "Today, the learned lecturer completed the decad commencing with the words 'Arukkum viṉai' (IX-8); tomorrow we shall listen to the discourse on the next decad, known as the evening brawl."

When Emperumāṉār (Śrī Rāmānuja) was studying this decad under Tirumālai Āṇṭāṉ, the latter said, Āḷavantār used to say that the Āḻvār suffered as much as all the cowherdesses of Virundāvan did suffer in one night, due to Lord Kṛṣṇa's desertion of them". "No", interrupted Emperumāṉār, "Sire, please say that he suffered all those pangs in the space of an evening, as a whole night is too long a period to keep him alive despite the pangs of separation from the Lord". Indeed, a moment's absence from God is an age of pangs to the love-lorn Saints; time seems stretched into an eternity and, during such moments, the very objects which cater to one's pleasures seem to be the instruments of torture, wantonly designed to aggravate their sufferings.

mallikai kamaḻ teṉṟal īrum, ālō!
    vaṇ kuṟiñci icai tavarum, ālō!
cel katir mālaiyum mayakkum, ālō!
    cekkar nal mēkaṅkaḷ citaikkum, ālō!
alli am tāmaraik kaṇṇaṉ, emmāṉ,
    āyaṟkaḷ ēṟu, ari-ēṟu, ēm māyōṉ
pulliya mulaikaḷum tōḷum koṇṭu,
    pukaliṭam aṟikilam tamiyam, ālō! (IX-9-1)

Translation

Alas! the jasmine scent, the southerly breeze does waft,
Cuts me across like the unrelenting shaft;

Ha! the tuneful singing of the birds does my ears pierce,
The evening Sun just sends me into a trance
While the pretty clouds, by the crimson sky lit, hack me to
  pieces;
Pity, I know not where I can resort
And survive the lingering memory of my Lord
Who did my breasts and shoulders in tight embrace hold,
The shepherd Chief, like unto a lion, with blooming lotus eyes.

Notes

(i) The Āḻvār gets into the vein of a Gopī whose pangs of separation from Kṛṣṇa, particularly in view of his delayed home-coming, were aggravated by the cool evening breeze, the setting Sun, crescent sky etc., individually and collectively. What is normally soothing and pleasurable acquires a different complexion altogether and turns out to be a veritable instrument of torture to the lover in a state of desolation. There are quite a few Ślokas in the first Sarga of Kiṣkindā Kāṇḍam (Rāmāyaṇa), pitched in the same key as this decad.

(ii) The approach of night-fall only heightens the gloom, as even that little distraction of mind afforded by the sight of things around, by day, is no longer possible when one is locked up in darkness. The crescent sky and the clouds, seen in that setting, vividly remind the Nāyakī of the exquisite form of the Lord, limb by limb; what then are the chances of her survival through forgetting her erstwhile union with Him?

pukaliṭam aṟkilam tamiyam, ālō!
  pulampuṟu maṇi, teṉṟal āmpal, ālō!
pakal aṭumālai, vaṇ cāntam, ālō!
  pañcamam, mullai, taṇ vāṭai, ālō!
akal iṭam paṭaittu, iṭantu, uṇṭu umiḻntu, aḷantu,
  eṅkum aḷikkiṉṟa āyaṉmāyōṉ,
ikaliṭattu acurarkaḷ kūṟṟam vārāṉ-iṉi iruntu,
  eṉ uyirkākkum āṟu eṉ? (IX–9–2)

Translation

Alas! where is the place I can, in seclusion, live?
The tinkling of the cattle bells, the sounding of the bugle
And the southerly breeze, that unto me blows, are oppressive;
The evening that marks the end of day, the sweet sandal,
The cooing of the birds, the jasmine scent and the cool breeze,
I can hardly tell how all these do my life squeeze;
How can I my life preserve when the wondrous cowherd
  turns not,
The Benefactor great, Who the worlds did ordain, ate and spat,
Deadly unto the fell Asuras on the battle-front?

Note

Well, all those things that regaled the Nāyakī when in the company of her Lord, now oppress her. The Lord, who extends protection to His subjects, in ever so many ways, having withdrawn Himself from Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī, she hardly knows how she can at all hold her life.

iṉi iruntu, eṉ uyir kākkum āṟu eṉ?
  iṇai mulai namuka, nuṇ iṭai nuṭaṅka,
tuṉi irum kalaviceytu, ākam tōyntu,
  tuṟantu, emmai iṭṭu, akal kaṇṇaṉ, kaḷvaṉ,
taṉi iḷam ciṅkam, em māyaṉ vārāṉ;
  tāmaraik kaṇṇum, cevvāyum, nīlap
paṉi irum kuḻalkaḷum, nāṉku tōḷum
  pāviyēṉ maṉattē niṉṟu irum, ālō! (IX–9–3)

Translation

Is there at all any means for me to hold my life on?
My wondrous Lord Kaṇṇaṉ, the peerless cub, the thief, has
  gone,
Having with me mingled so well, in great grief did He land
Me with sagging breasts and waist overworked; this sinner's
  mind
Is haunted, alas! by His lotus eyes and coral lips,
Lovely locks, long and cool and shoulders four.

Note

Apart from the physical objects around, such as the southerly breeze, fragrance of flowers etc., tormenting the Nāyakī, the Lord's exquisite Form also comes to her mind's eye, limb by limb, and oppresses her. Should He, who now keeps aloof, unmindful of her, have at all come and mingled with her and that too, in the manner He did? Poor Nāyakī, she cannot endure her separation from Him, through forgetting Him, because of His inseparable charm, haunting her mental vision all the time.

pāviyēṉ maṉattē niṉṟu īrum, ālō!
vāṭai-taṉ vāṭai vev vāṭai, ālō!
mēvu taṇ matiyam vem matiyam, ālō!
meṉ malarp paḷḷi vem paḷḷi, ālō!
tūvi am puḷ uṭait teyva vaṇṭu
tutaintа em peṇmai am pū itu, ālō!
āviyiṉ paramam alla vakaikaḷ, ālō!
yāmuṭai neñcamum tuṇai aṉṟu, ālō! (IX–9–4)

Translation

Alas! the Lord's lingering Form does my mind haunt and split,
Ha! the cool southerly breeze does fire on me spit,
The gentle rays of the lovable Moon do heat emit,
What! the flower bed, soft and somnolent, has turned hot!
The flower of my feminity has been sucked and sapped
By the Divine Bee, the Lord Supreme Who is equipped
With Garuḍa, the hefty bird with plumes large as His vehicle,
Indeed, all these are hard to endure for my poor soul,
My mind too, my companion of yore, is now of no avail.

Note

It would be hardly appropriate for an young lady to give vent to expressions of this kind, openly complaining of her amorous lot. But then, the Nāyakī does not mince matters; she makes no secret of the fact that her feminity is no longer *intact*, having been thrown out of gear by her erstwhile union with the Lord. The Divine bee (Lord) has sucked the flower of her feminity and sapped it. Even the other

alternative to external perception, namely, mental comprehension and rapport is not possible, the mind having also become defunct.

yāmuṭai neñcamum tuṇai aṉṟu, ālō!
ā puku mālaiyum ākiṉṟu, ālō!
yāmuṭai āyaṉ-taṉ maṉam kal, ālō!
avaṉuṭait tīm kuḻal īrum, ālō!
yāmuṭait tuṇai eṉṉum tōḻimārum
emmil muṉ avaṉukku māyvar, ālō!
yāmuṭai ār uyir kākkumāṟu eṉ?–
avaṉuṭai aruḷpeṟum pōtu aritē! (IX–9–5)

Translation

Alas! my mind is unto me of no avail,
'Tis evening and the cows are due back home;
Should Gopāl's enchanting flute tempt my heart and steal
While His heart turns into a veritable stone?
Pity! ere me, my mates are in distress great
Weighed down by my sorry state;
How can I preserve my life dear
When His grace unto me is so dear?

Notes

(i) If, as the Nāyakī puts it, her beloved Lord has become stonyhearted, she could as well take due note of it and give up pining for Him. But she couldn't, having been attracted by the sweet strains from His magic flute, conveying, as it were, His pleadings. As Nampiḷḷai would have it, Kṛṣṇa, the Divine shepherd was trotting out excuses, such as, "I am sorry, I had to go after the cattle and even so, I am late in coming home; pity, I have been unavoidably detained and so on". All these were conveyed by Him through the flute, which naturally put the Nāyakī back into the picture.

(ii) The Nāyakī's frightful loneliness, making her despair of her survival, is vividly brought out in this song; her mind is of no avail and she lacks the soothing company

of her mates who have broken down already, unable to witness her dire distress.

avaṉuṭai aruḷpeṟum pōtu aritāl;
    av aruḷ allaṉa aruḷum alla;
avaṉ aruḷ peṟum aḷavu āvi nillātu;
    aṭu pakal mālaiyum neñcum kāṇēṉ;
civaṉoṭu piramaṉ vaṇ tirumaṭantai
    cēr tiru-ākam em āvi īrum;
evaṉ iṉip pukum iṭam? evaṉ ceykēṉō?
    ārukku eṉ collukēṉ? aṉṉaimīrkāḷ! (IX–9–6)

Translation

His is indeed the only grace. Him to attain,
And yet, it is so dear; my life I can't hold on
Till I do His grace obtain, the evening is on,
Marking the day's end, pity, I am left alone,
My mind, my companion in solitude, I do miss,
My Lord holds Civaṉ, Piramaṉ and Tirumaṭantai, all at once,
On His lovely person and thus my soul enthrals;
Ye, elders, what shall I do, where do I shelter take
And to whom shall I my appeal make?

Note

"How is it", the Nāyakī revolves in her mind, "the Lord, Who was anxiously looking out, for some one to be the recipient of His grace, has made it scarce, in my case?" Well, cannot one look up to some one else, for such grace? No, there is no grace but His and yet, the Saint cannot patiently await its descent in due course; his yearning soul can hardly be sustained except by the rapid influx of the Lord's grace. "What a pity!", the saint vexes himself, "I can't have what these blokes, Kāpāli (Śiva, holding the skull in hand) and Kantar (Brahmā) could have easy access to", referring to the allotment of space on His very person by the Lord for them. While the Lord's navel is the seat of Brahmā, Tirumaṭantai (Lakṣmī) is inseparably poised on the Lord's winsome chest and Śiva takes shelter in the space allotted on the right side of the Lord's body, in times of grave emergency, as a measure of safety.

ārukku eṉ collukēṉ? aṉṉaimīrkāḷ!
    ār uyir aḷavu aṉṟu ik kūr taṇ vāṭai;
kār okkum mēṉi nam kaṇṇaṉ kaḷvam
    kavarnta at taṉi neñcam avaṉ kaṇakṯē;
cīr uṟṟa akil-pukai, yāḻ naṟampu
    pañcamam, taṇ pacum cāntu aṇaintu,
pōr uṟṟa vāṭai, taṇ mallikaippūp
    putu maṇam mukantukoṇṭu, eṟiyum, ālō! (IX–9–7)

Translation

Kaṇṇaṉ, my cloud-hued Lord did my mind steal
And in Him does it abide; the incense with fragrance filled,
The music of the lyre, the cooing of the Koel, the sandal cool,
The southerly breeze did all gather together and these are pitted
Against poor me, along with the fragrance of jasmine, in fresh bloom;
Ye, elders, unto whom shall I complain?
The biting blast does my soul torment.

Note

The elderly ladies around derive comfort from the very things which oppress the Nāyakī, as if they have all conspired together to torment her. How then can they feel her pulse and sympathise with her? Verily, they just cannot follow the language of the Saint, soaked in God-love.

putu maṇam mukantu koṇṭu eṟiyum, ālō!
    poṅku iḷa vāṭai; puṉ cekkar, ālō!
atu maṇantu akaṉṟa nam kaṇṇaṉ kaḷvam
    kaṇṇaṉil koṭitu; iṉi ataṉil umpar
matu maṇa mallikai mantak kōvai,
    vaṇ pacum cāntiṉil-pañcamam vaittu-
atu maṇantu, iṉ aruḷ āycciyarkkē
    ūtum at tīm kuḻaṟkē uyyēṉ nāṉ. (IX–9–8)

Translation

The chill blast does pierce me with increasing intensity
And alas! it brings with it fragrance in its virginity,
The crescent sky does its quota of misery add,

Even more cruel than Kaṇṇaṉ are His covert deeds,
The jasmine flowers, with honey and fragrance studded
Do waft their gentle smell, the sandal, cool and nice,
And the sweet amorous notes which Kaṇṇaṉ's flute plays
Unto the shepherd damsels, all these my life do flay.

Note

A series of things oppress the Nāyakī in her present state of desolation, as stated above. While the memory of her erstwhile union with the Lord haunts her and makes her feel that His deeds are even more cruel than Himself, the enchanting melody of His flute is the last straw to break her back. The last-mentioned alone is enough to take her life out.

ūṟum at tīm kuḻaṟkē uyyēṉ nāṉ;
atu moḻintu, iṭai iṭai, taṉ cey kōlat
tūtu cey kaṇkaḷ koṇṭu oṉṟu pēci,
tū moḻi icaikaḷ koṇṭu oṉṟu nōkki,
pēṭuṟu mukamceytu nontu nontu,
pētai neñcu aṟavu aṟap pāṭum pāṭṭai
yātum oṉṟu aṟikilam; ammā! ammā!
mālaiyum vantatu-māyaṉ vārāṉ. (IX–9–9)

Translation

I can't but succumb to the haunting melody of that pipe
That does His amorous advances convey, now and then;
His tell-tale eyes do His message speak with unique get-up,
His tuneful songs do glances throw and His deep concern
For girls with aching heart, His face reveals,
The songs He sings, anxious to put them at ease,
We hardly know; alas! evening has come
But the wondrous one is yet to come.

Note

It is the enchanting melody of Kṛṣṇa's flute, interspersed with significant statements, now and then, that disarms the Gopīs and makes them resile from the determined stand previously taken by them, not to mix with Him any longer. The

Lord speaks through His eyes and sees through His tuneful songs. He is wondrous, in the sense, that even those, who were averse to Him, while in a state of desolation due to separation from Him, would feel remorseful for their erstwhile unrelenting attitude towards Him, when He eventually comes and mingles with them. So freely does He mingle with His devotees and, in the process, exhibit amazing simplicity.

mālaiyum vantatu; māyaṉ vārāṉ;
mā maṇi pulampa val ēṟu aṇainta
kōla nal nākukaḷ ukaḷum, ālō!
koṭiyaṉa kuḻalkaḷum kuḻaṟum, ālō!
vāl oḷi vaḷar mullai, karumukaikaḷ,
mallikai alampi, vaṇṭu ālum, ālō!
velaiyum vicumpil viṇṭu alaṟum, ālō!
eṉ colli uyvaṉ iṅku-avaṉai viṭṭē? (IX–9–10)

Translation

Ha! evening has arrived but not my Lord; the comely cows mingle
With the hefty bulls and their bells do tinkle,
Alas! the sweet music of the flute is tantalizing, the bees do gather
Honey from the white jasmine and many other flowers
And diving deep into them do hum, the roaring sea rends the air;
And now, how can I survive these that against me do conspire?

Note

Kṛṣṇa has not returned home at the appointed time; meanwhile quite a number of things oppress the Gopīs to such an extent that their mere survival becomes a problem.

avaṉaiviṭṭu akaṉṟu, uyir āṟṟakillā
aṇi iḻai āycciyar mālaip pūcal
avaṉai viṭṭu akalvataṟkē iraṅki,
aṇi kurukūrc caṭakōpaṉ, māṟaṉ,

avaṉi uṇṭu umiḻntavaṉmēl uraitta
āyirattuḷ ivai pattum koṇṭu
avaṉiyuḷ alaṟṟi niṉṟu uymmiṉ toṇṭīr!
ac coṉṉa mālai naṇṇit toḻutē. (IX–9–11)

Translation

Ye, devout workers, chant with delight over here, these songs ten,
Out of the thousand composed, in sweet adoration
Of the Lord Who the worlds ate up and then spat, by Caṭa kōpaṉ
Of Kurukūr Who did separation from Him lament,
As did the bejewelled shepherdesses, one evening,
Unable to brook separation from Kaṇṇaṉ, and salvation attain,
Worshipping Tirumāl, [the Lord] mentioned therein

Note

This end-song reveals the benefit of chanting this decad, wherein the Āḻvār suffers the pangs of separation like unto those gone through by the Gopis (damsels of Virundāvan) at dusk, unable to put up with the delayed appearance of Kṛṣṇa. The chanters of this decad are assured of salvation, namely, eternal service at the feet of the Lord, without their suffering the pangs of separation from the Lord, as in the case of the Gopis and the Āḻvār.

Ninth Centum—Tenth Decad (IX-10)
(Mālai naṇṇi)

Preamble

In the eighth decad of this Centum, the Āḻvār exhibited his inordinate longing for communion with the Lord and his great grief, due to the non-realisation of the union longed for, found expression in the following decad. Seeing the Āḻvār, in such dire distress, the Lord spoke to him thus: " Well, your grief apart, mine is indeed greater than yours, inasmuch as I have not, as yet, got at you and the privation is mine; it is only for your sake that I have come down, all the way, from the High Heavens to the holy

centre of Tirukkaṇṇapuram, near at hand. Surely, I will grant you your desire, at the end of the current span of life ". Thus placated, the Āḻvār gives vent to his joy, in this decad. The fifth song of this decad is the topical one, stressing the fact that the Lord is the great Benefactor, the granter of Mokṣa (eternal emancipation) when the body falls off, at the end of the current span of life.

Once again, the Saint, with his characteristic compassion for the sorrowing mankind, sunk deep down the ocean of ' Samsāra ', addresses them all. He preaches unto them, the path of loving surrender to the Lord who is easily accessible to one and all, at the holy Tirukkaṇṇapuram, bent upon retrieving the votaries. Even if they cannot perform the physical act of prostration at the feet of the Lord, with unflinching faith, surrender unto Him calls for, the mere mention of the name of that holy centre, Tirukkaṇṇapuram, will deliver the goods (vide tenth song of this decad).

mālai naṇṇit toḻutu eḻumiṉō, viṉai keṭa,
kālai mālai kamala malar iṭṭu, nīr—
vēlai mōtum matiḷ cūḻ tiruk kaṇṇapurattu
a'iṉmēl āl amarntāṉ aṭi-iṇaikaḷē. (IX–10–1)

Translation

Get near the Māl [Lord] at Tirukkaṇṇapuram, surrounded by walls,
The oceanic waves dash against, the One that on a fig-leaf lay
On a sheet of water vast and worship, ye. men, one and all.
Placing lotus flowers at His lovely pair of feet, night and day
And salvation attain, purged of your sins, one and all.

Notes

(i) What the Āḻvār preaches, in this decad, is briefly mentioned here. There is indeed no restriction on the flowers with which the Lord is to be worshipped. No flower is taboo and, in the name of burning incense, as part of worship, even a heap of garbage could be burnt and smoke raised therefrom. The outward offerings may be trifles but, in God's eyes, they carry much weight when offered with humility and devotion.

(ii) The sea seems to have receded from the township since; it might have been right on the sea-shore, with the billows breaking against the temple walls, during the days of the Āḻvār.

kaḷ aviḻum malar iṭṭu, ṉīr iṟaiñcumiṉ—
naḷḷi cērum vayal cūḻ kiṭaṅkiṉ puṭai
veḷḷi ēynta matiḷ cūḻ tirukkaṇṇapuram
uḷḷi, nāḷum toḻutu eḻumiṉō, toṇṭarē! (IX–10–2)

Translation

Ye, devout men, worship the Lord with flowers fine, studded, with honey,
And salvation do attain, lovingly meditating on Tirukkaṇṇapuram daily,
The holy place enclosed by stately walls reaching the very sky,
Whose moats the fields adjoin where female crabs go gay.

Notes

(i) That there is no restriction on the flowers to be used for worshipping the Lord is brought out by reference, in this song, to honey-studded flowers, in general, and not merely the lotus, as mentioned in the preceding song. All that is needed is that the flowers should be fresh and not dried up. These flowers are only symbolic of the eight varieties of flowers to be employed by the votaries for worship, namely, '*Ahimsā*' (non-violence), '*Indṛya nigrahaḥ*' (control over the sensory organs), '*Sarva bhūta dayā*' (compassion for one and all), '*Kṣamā*' (forgiveness) '*Dhyānam*' (Meditation), '*Tapaḥ* (penance or austerity), '*Jnānam*' (knowledge) and '*Satyam*' (Truth or veracity). This is brought out, in the following śloka:

"*Ahimsā* puṣpam pratamaṁ puṣpaṁ, puṣpaṁ *Indṛya nigrahaḥ*, *Sarvabhūtadayā* puṣpaṁ, *Kṣamā* puṣpaṁ viśeṣataḥ, *Dhyānam* puṣpaṁ, *tapaḥ* puṣpaṁ, *Jnānam* puṣpaṁ tataivaca, *Satyam* aṣṭavidam puṣpaṁ Viṣnoḥ pritikaraṁ bhaveth".

(ii) Even loving meditation of this holy centre will secure one's salvation. This could be done all the time, without restriction, unlike the dip in the oceanic waters, which is permissible only on certain specified days.

toṇṭar! num tam tuyar pōka, nīr ēkamāy,
viṇṭu vāṭā malar iṭṭu, nīr iṟaiñcumiṉ—
vaṇṭu pāṭum poḻil cūḻ tirukkaṇṇapurattu
aṇṭa vāṇaṉ, amarar perumāṉaiyē. (IX–10–3)

Translation

Ye, devout men, worship with devotion supreme
And offer flowers in fresh bloom
Unto the Sovereign Master of the Universe, Who dwells
In Tirukkaṇṇapuram amid orchards where humming bees revel
And thus all your ills and evils dispel.

Notes

(i) The highest love to God is love rendered with no personal end in view but culminating in benediction or glorification of God. Love, so disinterestedly rendered, is love of purity and virginity, which carries with it the highest reward, namely, possession of God Himself. It is this kind of loving worship that the Āḻvār is preaching to the world around, now addressed by him with his characteristic solicitude and tenderness of heart.

(ii) The bees allude to the knowledgeable savants, with a keen sense of discrimination, capable of picking up the essentials (honey) and discarding the otherwise.

(iii) The Sovereign Master of the Universe, the overlord of the Celestials has condescended to come down to our midst, taking up abode in Tirukkaṇṇapuram where His dispensation operates both ways. The Lord not only dispels our age-long sins but also confers on us heavenly bliss, right here, in His immediate presence. Unlike the infirmary for the blind, where the sighted do not have to go for treatment, even the Celestials, well beyond the mischief of dark necescience, have to come

to this dark land, to taste the Lord's amazing simplicity (Saulabhya) which is far more pronounced here than in heaven.

māṉai nōkki maṭap piṉṉai-taṉ kēḷvaṉai,
tēṉai, vāṭā malar iṭṭu, nīr iṟaiñcumin;
vāṉai untum matiḷ cūḻ tirukkaṇṇapuram
tāṉ nayanta perumāṉ caraṇ ākumē. (IX–10–4)

Translation

Worship our sire with choice flowers, in fresh bloom,
The doe-eyed Piṉṉai's Spouse, sweet as honey;
The Lord that lovingly stays in Tirukkaṇṇapuram,
Whose walls rise up to the sky, is indeed our haven.

Notes

(i) The doe-eyed Consort of the Lord is the unfailing intercessor between man and God and the Āḻvār is, therefore, sure of the salvation of his addressee (the worldlings) whom he advises to approach the Lord through the good offices of the Divine Mother.

(ii) The Āḻvār has indeed to deal with a cross-section of humanity, with varying degrees of spiritual calibre and equipment. He would not, therefore, leave out of his purview those who have not, as yet, developed that robust faith in the Lord, which makes them look upon Him as the Ready Means (siddhopāya), the Means and the End, rolled into one. For the lesser grades of mankind, he preaches the form of worship involving the use of materials, such as flowers, fresh and fine, honey etc., the 'Sāṅga Bhakti', as it is called, vide aphorism 227 of 'Ācārya Hṛdayam'.

caraṇam ākum taṉa tāḷ aṭaintārkku eḷḷām;
maraṇam āṉāl vaikuntam koṭukkum pirāṉ,
araṇ amainta matiḷ cūḻ tirukkaṇṇapurat
taraṇiyāḷaṉ, taṉatu aṉparkku aṉpu ākumē. (IX–10–5)

Translation

Unto those that seek refuge at His feet
He is the perfect Protector indeed;
Unto those that love Him with all their heart
The Sovereign Lord is all love; the Ruler great
Of Tirukkaṇṇapuram, enclosed by walls, safe and secure,
Is the Benefactor great that heavenly bliss does dower
At the fall of this material body, the outer cover.

Note

As already stated in the preamble to this decad, this is the topical song of this decad. The Lord, enshrined at Tirukkaṇṇapuram, vouchsafes heavenly bliss, at the end of the current span of life, unto those that seek refuge at His lovely pair of feet. This is the unfailing path of loving surrender at the Lord's pair of feet, as the Sole means of salvation, which is open to one and all, unlike the discipline of 'Bhakti yoga' indicated in the three preceding stanzas, restricted to certain categories of persons. The Lord having assured the Āḻvār that he would be granted entry into the High Heavens as soon as his body falls off, the Āḻvār complacently styles the Lord as the "Granter of Heaven, at one's death".

aṉpaṉ ākum, taṉa tāḷ aṭaintārkku ellām;
cem poṉ ākattu avuṇaṉ uṭal kīṇṭavaṉ,
naṉ poṉ ēynta matiḷ cūḻ tirukkaṇṇapurattu
aṉpaṉ, nāḷum taṉa meyyarkku meyyaṉē. (IX–10–6)

Translation

Love He bears unto those that seek refuge at His feet,
The body of Avuṇaṉ, of the hue of red gold, He split,
Our Lord, Who loves to stay in Tirukkaṇṇapuram,
Whose boundary walls, set with pure gold, do gleam,
Truly loves those that bear true love unto Him.

Notes

(i) Whosoever takes refuge at the Lord's feet is tended by Him with the same loving care, without distinction of high and low.

(ii) It was young Prahlādā's great devotion unto the Lord, that made Him shed His enormous grace on him, despite his belonging to the Rākṣasa clan, and slay his dastardly sire, Avuṇan (Hiraṇya). The Lord loves His devotees even more dearly than they love Him and He has lovingly chosen Tirukkaṇṇapuram, as His abode, wherein He exhibits this great trait. The Āḻvār, therefore, calls upon people to worship Him at this holy centre, with unflinching devotion, devoid of selfish ends.

meyyaṉ ākum, virumpit toḻuvārkku ellām;
poyyaṉ ākum, puṟamē toḻuvārkku ellām;
ceyyil vāḷai ukaḷum tirukkaṇṇapurattu
aiyaṉ ākattu aṇaippārkaṭku aṇiyaṉē. (IX–10–7)

Translation

All His glory and splendour He does reveal
Unto those that seek Him as the Be-all and End-all;
On the other hand, His true nature He does conceal
From them that worship Him for achieving their personal needs;
Our Sire at Tirukkaṇṇapuram, in whose fertile fields
The fishes play about, is very close indeed
To those that keep Him in their hearts imbedded.

Note

The Lord stays in His worshippable from at Tirukkaṇṇapuram, revealing Himself fully, unto those that love Him dis-interestedly, as an end in itself, and concealing His true nature from those who seek petty, personal favours from Him and formally propitiate Him to secure their personal ends, devoid of true love unto Him.

aṇiyaṉ ākum, taṉa tāḷ aṭaintārkku ellām;
piṇiyum cārā; piṟavi keṭuttu āḷum;
maṇi poṉ ēynta matiḷ cūḻ tirukkaṇṇapuram-
paṇimiṉ nāḷum-paramēṭṭi-taṉ pātamē. (IX–10–8)

Translation

May You for ever adore the lovely feet of the Supreme Lord
At holy Tirukkaṇṇapuram, enclosed by walls, with gold and ruby laid,
Him that is near at hand to those that lovingly worship
His pair of feet and thus the dreadful cycle of birth escape,
Rid of all ills and evils that dare not clasp you any more.

Note

The loving worship, referred to here, is the disinterested love of God, with no personal ends in view, which culminates in the highest reward, namely, possession of God Himself. Unto such votaries, the Lord is ever close and easily accessible and the natural corollary to this state is the riddance of their ills and evils, one and all, including the dreadful cycle of birth and death. Tirukkaṇṇapuram, the holy centre on Earth, looms like a Heavenly spot, set with gold, gems and rubies, in the eyes of the Saint.

pātam nāḷum paṇiya, taṇiyum piṇi;
ētam cārā; eṉakkēl iṉi eṉkuṟai?
vēta nāvar virumpum tirukkaṇṇapurattu
ātiyāṉai aṭaintārkku allal illaiyē. (IX–10–9)

Translation

Sorrow there's none unto those that adore
The Primate, the Lord Supreme Who dwells
At Tirukkaṇṇapuram, the Vedic Scholars' favourite abode;
My mind with love unto Him does always swell,
Him that does His feet for ever truly worship,
Ills and evils shall no longer clasp;
Is there now indeed anything I lack?

Note

The Saint preaches unto the world, voicing forth his own experience which they can very well share, if only they would adore, likewise, the feet of the Supreme Lord. The age-long accumulation of sins has been wiped off, in full, and the

dreadful contingency of sins accruing hereafter has also been ruled out. If this is the case with the Āḷvār, there's no reason why others should not achieve what he did, if only they would likewise pin all their faith in the Supreme Lord, the first and foremost, and lovingly adore His feet. Is there indeed any care or anxiety for the young one that reposes on the complacent lap of the Mother?

illai allal; eṉakkēl iṉi eṉ kuṟai?
alli mātar amarum tirumārpiṉaṉ
kalliḷ ēynta matiḷ cūḻ tirukkaṇṇapuram
colla, nāḷum tuyar pāṭu cārāvē. (IX-10-10)

Translation

All my miseries have gone and wants have I none,
Sorrows are at a distance kept, at the mere mention
Of the name of holy Tirukkaṇṇapuram, which stone walls enclose,
Where resides the Lord on whose winsome chest does repose
Tiru (Lakṣmī), His lotus-born spouse.

Note

The Āḷvār disclosed in the preceding song that he enjoys absolute freedom from miseries and that there is hardly any felicity that he lacks. He now says that this blissful state can be attained even by those who are incapable of pursuing the hard line of Bhakti or the path of loving surrender to His sweet grace (Prapatti), by merely mentioning the name of the holy centre, known as Tirukkaṇṇapuram. There dwells the Lord on whose winsome chest always stays the inseparable Divine Mother, the unfailing Mediatrix, the great intercessor between God and man, the very personification of grace, ever ready to wink at our countless transgressions.

pāṭu cārāviṉai paṟṟu aṟa veṇṭuvīr!
māṭamnīṭu kurukūrc caṭakōpaṉ col
pāṭalāṉa tamiḻ āyirattuḷ ippattum
pāṭi āṭi paṇimiṉ avaṉ tāḷkaḷē (IX-10-11)

Translation

Those of You that wish to banish effectively your age-long sins,
Will do well to dance, singing lustily these songs ten,
Out of the thousand choice Tamil Songs composed by Caṭakōpaṉ
Of Kurukūr, with castles tall, and the Lord's holy feet attain.

Notes

(i) Even the end-song partakes of the character of the other songs, in this decad, couched, as it is, in the form of an address (advice) to the men around. It can also be interpreted as conveying the benefit accruing by dint of singing these ten songs, namely, attainment of the Lord's blissful feet. Those who sing, tunefully and with ecstatic devotion, these ten songs in adoration of Lord Śourirājaṉ, enshrined in Tirukkaṇṇapuram, will have their sins eradicated, root and branch and attain His glorious feet. These mellifluous songs, like unto fragrant flowers, are so sweet that they hold out an irresistible fascination even to the non-zealous and unfriendly ones, if they did but once recite them.

(ii) It was the super-abundant grace of Lord Kṛṣṇa, that impelled Him to restate through His Song Celestial, the central teachings of the Upaniṣads, for the benefit of the different grades of mankind in varying stages of evolution. Even so, Saint Nammāḻvār, well on the verge of entry into the destined land, the Heaven, would not rest on his oars but address the worldlings, out of deep compassion, with an eye on the spiritual uplift of one and all. He has indeed a recipe to suit every taste, seeing that men's tastes differ according to their calibre and equipment—vide aphorism 227 of Ācārya Hṛdayam.

THE CENTUM, IN RETROSPECT
(DECAD-WISE SUMMARY)

(IX-1): Love unto the Godly men, dwelt upon, in the concluding decad of the eighth Centum, is automatically carried over to all those closely associated with them and the love so generated reverts to the Lord, as the One loved and revered by the devotees. And so, the Āḻvār illustrates copiously and in a telling manner, *in the opening decad of this centum*, the utter futility of our hanging on to the earthly relations and all else except the Supreme Lord Who alone is our Eternal Saviour and Sole Sustainer under all circumstances. The miserable hollowness of the ephemeral bonds of the earthly relations and associates, the veritable parasites, is exposed by the Āḻvār in all its nakedness. This decad is said to be in benedictive adoration of Mathurā, in Uttara Pradesh, in view of the frequent references to that holy centre, hallowed by its association with Vāmana and Kṛṣṇa; it was also the capital of the kingdom, ruled by Śatrugna, Lord Rāma's youngest brother;

(IX-2): With the awareness that the Lord stays in His worshippable (Iconic) Form in Tiruppuḻiṅkuṭi in order to extend to His votaries all the benefits which they could expect from their earthly relations, the Āḻvār now proceeds (mentally of course) to that holy centre, eager to become the recipient of the Lord's love and attention. But then, the Lord remained unresponsive and yet, it did not detract from the Āḻvār's immense faith in Him, as his all. What agitated the Āḻvār's mind was the manner in which the Lord was reclining in the holy centre without changing sides, even once, by way of adjustment. Closetted with the Lord, in the shrine, the Āḻvār pleads with Him privately, *in the second decad*, that He should deign to move about, come forward a few paces, in the company of His Divine Consorts, greet him with His bewitching smiles and so on ;

[Meaning apart, the diction of this decad (original text) is such as to melt even stony hearts. Those of us, who get caught up in the bewildering complexities of life, will do well to chant this decad and feel relieved and refreshed. How soothing are these verses indeed!]

(IX-3): In the second decad, the Āḻvār fervently prayed that the Lord be pleased to turn His sweet glances on him, grant audience to him and the denizens of all the three worlds, remaining in a seated posture, beckon him or come down to him and permit him to stroke His lovely pair of feet and so on. The Lord, however, focussed his attention on the fundamental relationship that subsists between them, which hardly affords any scope for such entreaties by him and much less, for the grief that results from the Lord's apparent non-compliance. The basic fact of the Lord being Nārāyaṇā, in whom all things and beings inhere and who abides in all, reduces all things and beings to the abject position of mere bodies unto the Life within, dominating, directing and supporting them. Consoled thus by the Lord, in quite a convincing manner, the Saint regains his composure and gives vent, *in the third decad*, to his rapturous admiration of Lord Nārāyana, as our Sole Benefactor, His great concern for His subjects and loving condescension;

(IX-4): Keen to maintain His reputation as the repository of the auspicious qualities of tender solicitude, etc., denoted by His name, Nārāyanā, (which come to the fore through the irresistible spell cast on Him by Goddess Mahālakṣmī) the Lord presented Himself to the Āḻvār. Overjoyed by the Lord's presence (mental vision), the Āḻvār gives vent, *in the fourth decad*, to his gratitude for the Lord having pressed him into service and got these hymns sung by him, for the edification of the pious. "What a bliss and that too, bestowed on a single individual!" is how the Āḻvār revolves in his mind ;

(IX-5): In the eighth song of the fourth decad, the Āḻvār referred to his having got the vision of Lord Kṛṣṇa, a by-gone Avatāra. This led him to the desire for external perception of the Lord as well, without being confined to a mere mental vision. It did not, however, materialise; worn out by dejection, due to this apparent desertion by the Lord, the Āḻvār tried to divert his mind by seeking the fellowship of things around, bearing the Lord's likeness. But the very things, chosen for diversion, served only as incentives to remind the Āḻvār, all the more, about the Lord and thus torment him. We see the Āḻvār, *in the fifth decad*, in the plight of a female-lover, separated from the Lord after their erstwhile union, trying to sustain herself in the sweet environments of a lovely garden. But there, the warbling koel and the blue peacock remind the forlorn lover of the Lord's sweet accents and charming complexion and she at once concludes that the Lord has set these creatures on her, just to make her collapse, pining for Him. She, therefore, asks them why they are at such great pains to put an end to her life which she would as well part with, at her own volition. Even so, the Nāyaki manages to pull through, recounting, in this decad, the Lord's auspicious traits;

(IX-6): It was only the absorbing recollection of the immensity of the Lord's love, during their erstwhile union, experienced in the seventh decad of the eighth centum, that warmed up the Āḻvār. *In the sixth decad of this Centum*, the Āḻvār lauds the glory and greatness of the Deity enshrined in the pilgrim centre, called Tirukkāṭkarai (Kerala State), who kindled, in the Āḻvār, this kind of reminiscence and made him revert to the exhilarating mental state, as in VIII-7 ;

(IX-7): While in a reminiscent mood, as in the sixth decad, the Āḻvār developed once more a deep yearning for direct perception of the Lord. This led him on to send emissaries, *in the seventh decad*, to the Lord in His Iconic Form at Tirumūḻikkaḷam (Kerala State), the accent resting on His enchanting beauty. Put briefly, the message, to be conveyed by the birds to the Lord, is:

"Oh, Sire, enshrined as you are, in Tirumūḻikkaḷam, You seem to have got completely absorbed in the company of your Consorts and proximate attendants, to the exclusion of poor Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī. Alas! the Nāyakī, enthralled by your exquisite beauty, can hardly brook separation from you, any longer. Please take note of this fact and do hasten to her".

[*Note* : This is the last of the four decads in which messages were despatched to the Lord at different destinations, by the Alvar, figuratively transformed as a forlorn female lover, *the other three* being I-4, VI-1 and VI-8].

(IX-8) : The Āḻvār could hardly contain the effervescence of God-love in him and patiently await the return of the emissaries sent by him to the Lord, in the seventh decad. And so, he tried to sustain himself by meeting the Lord, enshrined in Tirunāvāy (Kerala State). But, in his present state of desolation and debility, he could not make the trip to that pilgrim centre. The next best he could do, under the circumstances, was to meditate on the Lord at Tirunāvāy, right from where he was. This is precisely what he does *in the eighth decad;*

(IX-9) : It is evening when the cool, southerly breeze wafts the sweet fragrance of the jasmine, in full bloom and the lovely Moon is up in the sky. And then, there is the roaring of the sea, the tuneful cooing of the warbling birds, the distant sound of the bugle and a host of other things, which make that part of the day highly delectable. But all these normal instruments of happiness affect the frustrated Āḻvār adversely, as he could not gain access to Tirunāvāy, much as he longed for. And so, *in the ninth decad*, the Āḻvār experiences the pangs of separation, undergone by the Gopīs (Shepherd damsels), during those evenings, when Kṛṣṇa was a little late in returning home after tending the grazing cattle, by day. On certain evenings, Kṛṣṇa would return at the head of the cattle, sounding the bugle, while, on other days, he would allow the cattle to go ahead and then walk behind them. Even that little prolongation of Kṛṣṇa's absence, in the latter case, upset the Gopīs who suffered the anguish of an age. The Āḻvār is found, in this decad, experiencing singly all those pangs of Gopīs in the above context;

(IX-10) : Seeing the Āḻvār in dire distress, the Lord placated him by saying that He has come all the way from Heaven to near-by Tirukkaṇṇapuram only for his sake and that He will surely accomplish his desire, at the end of his current span of life. Thus placated, the Āḻvār gives vent to his joy, *in the concluding decad of this centum.* With his characteristic compassion for the sorrowing mankind, sunk deep in the ocean of Samsāra, he preaches unto them the path of loving surrender to the Lord who is easily accessible to one and all at the holy Tirukkaṇṇapuram, bent upon retrieving the votaries and assures them that even the mere mention of the name of that holy centre shall rid them of all, their sins and miseries.

BOOK X

Tenth Centum—First Decad (X-1)
(Tāḷa tāmarai)

Preamble

The declaration, made by the Saint in the preceding decad, that the Lord is the great Benefactor Who would grant 'Mokṣa' (eternal emancipation) when this body of ours falls off, is with reference to the clear assurance given to him by the Lord, to this effect. What looked earlier like an indefinite prospect has now acquired a concrete shape, time-bound, the farthest limit being the fall of the body at the end of the current span of life. Well, that he was fast nearing the end of his soul's journey, the Āḻvār was quite conscious of. His body had worn out to an extent that gave clear indication of its falling off very soon and the Āḻvār knew quite well that the day of his promised ascent to Heaven was near at hand. So then, the Āḻvār set about preparing for the final lap of his journey to the Celestium and sought the good offices of the Lord, in His worshippable form at Tirumōkūr, to escort him through. Finding the Lord at Tirumōkūr, as the super-abundant Benefactor, with profound knowledge and prowess, capable of steering through all obstacles, the Āḻvār got hold of Him as the unfailing escort, during his onward march to yonder Heaven.

But then, it might be questioned whether, during the soul's ascent to Heaven, the Lord's good offices should be specially requisitioned as above, seeing that the 'Arcis' and other functionaries do conduct the Heaven-bound souls and take charge of them at the various stages of the journey, in all their details. The answer to this poser can, however, be found in the Lord's own declaration in the carama śloka, delivered during His advent as Varāha Nāyaṇār (The Great Boar)—"Ahaṁ smarāmi Mad bhaktaṁ *nayāmi* paramāṁ gatim". The word in italics reveals that the Lord Himself conducts the liberated souls to the highest abode, namely, Heaven. This "Mārga Bandhu", the Āḻvār could spot out in the Lord at Tirumōkūr (near Maturai, in Tamil Nāḍu) and he, therefore, extols Him, in this decad. Apart from the Lord's attainments, His bewitching beauty is enough to make the Āḻvār follow Him, enjoying His exquisite charm, all along.

tāḷa tāmarait taṭam aṇi vayal tirumōkūr
nāḷum mēvi, naṉku amarntu niṉṟu, acurarait takarkkum
tōḷum nāṉku uṭaic curi kuḻal, kamalak kaṇ, kaṉi vāyk
kāḷamēkattai aṉṟi, maṟṟoṉṟu ilam-katiyē. (X-1-1)

Translation

Escort have we none but the cloud-hued Lord,
With shoulders four that shall the Asuras smite,
Curly locks, lotus eyes and lips, red and bright,
Who does for ever dwell with great delight
In Tirumōkūr with strong-petalled lotus ponds and rich paddy fields.

Notes

(i) It is but natural that a person, roasted by gruelling heat, looks for relief through a deep plunge into a cool pond or showers from the sky. The Āḻvār, about to be rid of the parching heat of Samsāra, has likewise got hold of Lord 'Kāḷamēgam', enshrined in Tirumōkūr. This Deity has also been referred to, later in this decad-vide eighth song, as the pond, cool and lovely, yielded by king Daśaratha, the safe Refuge, rather the one and only Refuge.

(ii) The lotus ponds and the paddy fields allude to the great ones, characterised by plain living (lying low, in utter humility, like the paddy crops studded with grains) and high thinking (like the lotus flowers, displayed majestically on the tall stalks sprouting from the watery depths).

(iii) The Lord resides in this sportive universe, with greater delight than in Heaven, because it is here that His auspicious traits of easy accessibility, tender solicitude etc., shine with greater splendour, like unto a lamp lit at night, as distinguished from one commissioned in broad day-light.

(iv) Even in His Arca or Iconic manifestation at Tirumōkūr, the Lord's sinewy shoulders proclaim the valorous deeds performed by them during His Avatāras (Incarnations), like unto the ear lobes, though not decorated with ear-rings at present, telling the tale of their erstwhile decoration.

ilam kati maṟṟoṉṟu emmaikkum-īṉ taṇ tuḷāyiṉ
alaṅkal am kaṇṇi, āyiram pēr uṭai ammāṉ
nalam koḷ nāṉmaṟai vāṇarkaḷ vāḻ tirumōkūr
nalam kaḻal-avaṉ aṭi niḻal taṭam aṉṟi, yāmē. (X-1-2)

Translation

Time without end, refuge have we none
But that lovely pond, the patronising shelter of the feet
Of the Lord, sporting tuḷaci garland, cool and fine,
Bearing a thousand names, Who has His feet firmly set
In Tirumōkūr, the abode of many a Vedic Scholar, sweet and sound.

Notes

(i) The Āḻvār avers that there is no haven till the end of time, other than the lovely pair of feet of the Lord at Tirumōkūr, of exquisite charm, feasting the eyes, bearing the holy names that elevate the soul.

(ii) The Lord's feet know no partiality, granting, as they do, shelter to one and all, irrespective of whether they are high or low, good or bad. cf. 'anālocita viśeṣa aśeṣa Loka Śaraṇyā!' (Saint Rāmānuja's address to the Lord in 'Śaraṇāgati gadya').

(iii) When one starts lauding the Lord, enthralled by His exquisite charm and His sinewy shoulders, sporting the lovely garland, His names afford ample scope for the enjoyment of His great glory, from various angles. Further, it makes one repent for one's failure to recite the Lord's names bespeaking His great glory, in the days gone by.

aṉṟi yām oru pukaliṭam ilam eṉṟu eṉṟu, alaṟṟi
niṉṟu, nāṉmukaṉ araṉoṭu tēvarkaḷ nāṭa,
veṉṟu, im mūvulaku aḷittu uḻalvāṉ tirumōkūr
naṉṟu nām iṉi naṇukutum-namatu iṭar keṭavē. (X-1-3)

tāḷa tāmarait taṭam aṇi vayal tirumōkūr
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veṉṟu, im mūvulaku aḷittu uḻalvāṉ tirumōkūr
naṉṟu nām iṉi naṇukutum-namatu iṭar keṭavē. (X-1-3)

Translation

May we from all our ills be free,
Getting well nigh Tirumōkūr, where stays the Lord,
Pledged to protect the worlds three,
Who did the arch enemies rid,
Of Nāṉmukāṉ, Araṉ and other devas who for succour prayed
Unto Him, proclaiming many a time.
That refuge they had none but Him.

Notes

"The Lord at Tirumōkūr is the Universal Protector and we, His vassals, are keen on getting His protection. We will, therefore, do well to get near the holy city, seek shelter at the feet of the Lord, as an end in itself, and be rid of all of our miseries", says the Āḻvār. Herein lies the difference between the Āḻvār's method of approach and that of Brahmā and other Devas who sought the Lord at the Milk-ocean, to secure their personal ends and the demoniac Kālayavanan, Jarāsanthan etc. who went to Mathura, bent upon evil.

iṭar keṭa emmaip pōntu aḷiyāy eṉṟu eṉṟu ētti,
cuṭar koḷ cōtiyait tēvarum muṉivarum toḻara,
paṭarkoḷ pāmpu-aṇaip paḷḷi koḷvāṉ tirumōkūr,
iṭar keṭa aṭi paravutum, toṇṭīr! vammiṉē. (X-1-4)

Translation

Come, ye, devotees, worship we shall offer
At the Lord's distress-dispelling feet in Tirumōkūr,
Where He on the capacious serpent-bed lays
So as to grant audience unto sages and Celestials,
Who His resplendent Form adore and many a time utter,
"May it please You, my Lord, to come down here
And our ills and evils cure."

Notes

(i) The Āḻvār invites the devout to come and worship the Lord, so easily accessible at Tirumōkūr and get rid of their miseries, *in toto*.

(ii) The sages and Celestials approach the Lord, whenever they are brought up against difficulties, and seek relief through Him; the Āḻvār too seeks succour from the Lord and yet, he stands on a different footing from others, in that he seeks not personal gains but eternal service unto the Lord, in keeping with his essential nature of being His exclusive vassal. The Sages of Daṇḍakāraṇya exhibited their emaciated bodies, tormented by the Rākṣasas stalking the forest, to Śrī Rāma and sought from Him, mere restoration of their bodily comforts. In dire contrast to this, Saint Nammāḻvār prayed unto the Lord, right in the opening song of 'Tiruviruttam', the first of his four hymnals, to cut out altogether this bedevilled body of his, full of dirt and disorderly conduct.

toṇṭīr! vammiṉ-nam cuṭar oḷi oru taṉi mutalvaṉ,
aṇṭam mūvulaku aḷantavaṉ aṇi tirumōkūr,
eṉ ticaiyum īṉ karumpoṭu perum cennel viḷaiyak
koṇṭa kōyilai valañceytu, iṅku āṭutum kūttē. (X-1-5)

Translation

Come, ye, devotees, let us sing and dance and go round
The temple at lovely Tirumōkūr with paddy fields fertile, all around
And sweet cane crops all over, where dwells with great delight
The peerless Projenitor with resplendent Form exquisite,
Our Lord, Who spanned the three worlds of the Universe vast.

Note

The Lord at Tirumōkūr having attracted the Āḻvār by revealing His glory, as the first cause of all things and beings, and His exquisite Form, the Āḻvār wants to share this extra-ordinary bliss with those around. He, therefore, invites them all to join him, so that they may all go round the temple at Tirumōkūr, dancing in ecstasy.

kūttaṉ, kōvalaṉ, kuṭaṟṟu val acurarkaḷ kūṟṟam,
ēttum naṅkaṭkum amararkkum muṉivarkkum iṉpaṉ,
vāytta taṉ paṇaivaḷa vayal cūḻ tirumōkūr
āttaṉ tāmarai aṭi aṉṟi, maṟṟu ilam-araṇē. (X-1-6)

Translation

Shelter have we none but the lotus feet
Of our Sire at Tirumōkūr, replete
With paddy fields and water sheds, cool and bright,
The divine cow-herd of majestic gait,
Deadly unto the Asuras who would miseries on others inflict;
Unto us that extol Him and the Devas, He is sweet indeed.

Notes

(i) No doubt, Śiva is famous as the great dancer (Naṭarājaṉ), full of thrills, but Lord Rāma's very gait is said to have been entrancing—c.f. 'Agrataḥ *prayayau* Rāmaḥ' (Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa) and equally majestic and enthralling was Lord Kṛṣṇa's gait.

(ii) While the Lord is deadly unto the Asuras who inflict miseries on the devout, He is very dear to His devotees, all alike, making no distinction between the 'Nitya Sūris' (Eternal Heroes) and the votary just admitted unto His fold. Could there be a greater friend and benefactor than the Lord Who keeps remembering His devotees, all the time, including those last moments of their lives when they remain unconscious and are no better than a piece of stone or log of wood, and conducts them to the highest state (Heaven)?

maṟṟu ilam araṇ-vāṉ perum pāḻ taṉi mutalāc
cuṟṟum nīr paṭaittu, ataṉ vaḻit tol muṉi mutalā
muṟṟum tēvarōṭu ulakuceyvāṉ tirumōkūr
cuṟṟi nām valañ ceyya, nam tuyar keṭum-kaṭitē. (X-1-7)

Translation

All our miseries will, in no time, be gone,
If we'd only go round Tirumōkūr where stays our Lord,
Who did usher in the universe vast, water-bound,
The primordial matter unique, which pleasures do yield
Of both the worlds, prajāpati, the hoary Sage

And the worlds peopled by Devas of all grades;
Other than this hallowed city, haven have we none.

Notes

(i) Would it be an exaggeration if the Āḻvar said that there is no Refuge other than the holy city of Tirumōkūr? No, not at all, for there dwells our Lord, the great Benefactor of all times, Who ushered in the entire Universe surrounded by the perepheral waters, pressed into service the Primordial Matter (Mūla Prakṛti) whence spring up things that make people earth-bound, enjoying the sensual pleasures or Heaven-bound, as the case may be, propagated the worlds with their colourful varieties through the Four-headed Brahmā, and is thus referred to herein, as the ancient Sage whose mind is deeply absorbed in the great task of creation.

(ii) If we circum-ambulated the holy centre, all our miseries, including our anxiety as to who would guide us in our ascent to Heaven, would vanish in a trice.

tuyar keṭum kaṭitu; aṭaintu vantu aṭiyavar! toḻumiṉ-
uyar koḷ cōlai oṇ taṭam aṇi oḷi tirumōkūr,
peyarkaḷ āyiram uṭaiya val arakkar pukku aḻunta,
tayarataṉ peṟṟa marakata maṇit taṭattiṉaiyē. (X-1-8)

Translation

Ye, devotees, all your miseries shall, in no time, disappear
If you'd come and worship the Tank, studded with sapphire,
King Tayarataṉ did yield, where the fell Rakṣasas, who bore
A thousand names, met their inglorious end,
Our Sire Who dwells in Tirumōkūr, with stately gardens and lovely ponds.

Notes

(i) Pond inside the temple at Tirumōkūr as well as outside! The ponds, outside the temple precincts, are studded with lotus while the Lord, enshrined within, looks like yet another such lotus pond, what with His complexion resembling the lotus leaf, His eyes and lips, hands and

feet, looking like the red lotus in fresh bloom. Śrī Rāma, the valiant son of King Daśaratha, is figuratively likened to a tank studded with blue gems (sapphire), the hot bed of destruction of the dastardly Rākṣasas. Tanks are beneficial to those who seek to bathe therein or slake their thirst. There are, however, some who fall into them and commit suicide. It is significant that the Lord did not, on His own, destroy the Asuras and Rākṣasas but they courted disaster and met their ignominious end at the hands of the Lord, like unto the winged caterpillars rushing to the burning lamps and getting roasted to death, in large numbers.

(ii) If the Lord earned a thousand names by virtue of His benevolence, so did the Rākṣasas too, by dint of their cruelty, such as "Yajña Śatru", "Brahma Śatru" etc.

maṇit taṭattu aṭi, malark kaṇkaḷ, pavaḷac cevvāy,
aṇik koḷ nāl taṭam tōḷ teyvam, acurarai eṉṟum
tuṇikkum val araṭṭaṉ uṟai poḻil tirumōkūr
naṇittu; nammuṭai nal araṇ nām aṭaintaṉamē. (X-1-9)

Translation

Blest are we with Tirumōkūr, near at hand,
Our sure haven, with many a lovely garden around,
Where dwells our mighty Lord, Who the Rākṣasa hordes
Would ever annihilate, the Supreme One with comely shoulders
four,
With coral lips and lotus eyes, Whose lovely pair
Of feet are like unto a tank, cool and clear.

Note

The Āḻvār rejoices that Tirumōkūr, the safe haven, is near at hand. It is a lovely place with a beautiful setting and there dwells the Lord Whose pair of feet are like unto a cool tank, lovely and limpid, Whose eyes are like the red lotus in fresh bloom, and lips are coral red, Whose sinewy shoulders bespeak His enormous strength that can smash to smithereens the Rākṣasa hordes, antagonising Him.

nām aṭainta nal araṇ namakku eṉṟu, nal amarar
tīmai ceyyum val acurarai añcic ceṉṟu aṭaintāl,
kāma rūpam koṇṭu, eḻuntu, aḷippāṉ tirumōkūr
nāmamē naviṉṟu eṇṇumiṉ, ēttumiṉ, namarkāḷ! (X-1-10)

Translation

Better learn, my men, to contemplate and reverently utter
The holy name of Tirumōkūr where stays our Lord to cater,
Assuming the form of His choice, to the pious Devas that bend
Before Him, frightened by the Asuras who on them miseries
land,
Seeing in Him, the Refuge, safe and sound.

Note

The Āḻvār invites those that are inclined to listen to him to utter the name of Tirumōkūr and adore that holy centre where stays the great Benefactor, ever ready to extend protection to His devotees, assuming the appropriate Form, at His sweet volition. Well, this is the place where even the Devas come and take refuge, frightened by the formidable Asuras, hell-bent to land them in miseries.

ēttumiṉ namarkāḷ! eṉṟu, tāṉ kuṭam āṭu
kūttaṉaik kurukūrc caṭakōpaṉ kuṟṟēvalkaḷ
vāytta āyirattuḷ ivai vaṇ tirumōkūrkku
itta pattu ivai ētta vallārkku iṭar keṭumē. (X-1-11)

Translation

The woes shall be gone of those that chant these songs ten,
Assigned to Tirumōkūr, from out of the thousand of Caṭakōpaṉ
Of Kurukūr, composed as a piece of service divine,
Adoring the Lord Who did the pot-dancing great,
Inviting the pious on-lookers to sing His glory with all their
might.

Notes

(i) These ten songs have been doled out to Tirumōkūr, out of the thousand composed by the Āḻvār, in adoration of

Lord Raṅganātha, the cloud-hued Lord enshrined in the walled city of Srirangam. Vide also notes below VII-2-11. The chanters of this decad will be rid of all miseries, including the anxiety to secure a suitable escort, during their ascent to heaven, which is assured to them at the end of the current span of life.

(ii) When Lord Kṛṣṇa did the pot-dancing, He exhorted the people around, as follows:

" May those of You that admire my valorous deeds, sing my glory as lustily as your gift of speech can cope with. " This goes to show that the Lord's deeds were exhilarating unto Him and others alike. Such a Lord is lauded by the Āḷvār through appropriate songs, set in choice diction.

Tenth Centum Second Decad (X-2)
(Keṭum iṭar)

Preamble

In this decad, the Āḷvār lauds the glory of the Lord, in His worshippable form at Tiruvaṉantapuram (in Kerala State). As we go on, we will find the Āḷvār calling successively at the holy centres of Tiruvāṭṭāṟu, Tirumāliruñcōlai, Tiruppēr and adoring the Lord enshrined in those places. A similar treatment is noticeable in the case of Tirumaṅkai Āḷvār also. He is found calling on the Lords of many holy places, all of them in a single decad of the tenth Centum (X-1) of his grand apocalypse (Periya Tirumoḷi). When asked by Nañcīyar to elucidate this visiting spree on the part of that Āḷvār, Bhaṭṭārya brought home the import, in a very telling manner. He said: " Don't you know, Son, when a girl is given in marriage, there comes a time when she has to leave her parental roof for that of her husband and that it is but natural that she then goes about visiting her relations and friends at this end, to take leave of them. So does the Āḷvār, as the time for departing to Heaven draws near; on the eve of his departure from this abode, he takes leave of the Lord in His worshippable form, at the various shrines over here, who did, as a matter of fact, instil and enrich his love for God in Heaven. "

Having been assured of his ascent to Heaven at the end of the current span of life, (IX-10-5), Saint Nammāḷvār quite well knew that the day of his ascent was near at hand. And that is why he has actively embarked on a programme of leave-taking.

keṭum iṭar āya ellām, kecavā! eṉṉa; nāḷum
koṭuviṉai ceyyum kūṟṟiṉ tamarkaḷum kuṟukakillār;
viṭam uṭai aravil paḷḷi virumpiṉāṉ curumpu alaṟṟum
taṭam uṭai vayal aṉantapuranakar pukutum iṉṟē. (X-2-1)

Translation

Right this day shall we enter holy Aṉantapuram
In whose ponds and fields fertile do merry bees hum,
Where the Lord reposes lovingly on His serpent-bed;
Your entry into the holy city, Yama's agents dare not impede,
Though they are known to torment continually; if we do but
utter
The holy name, ' Kēcava ', all our sins shall forthwith disappear.

Notes

(i) There could pos iblybe quite a few things, standing in the way of one's entry into the holy city of Aṉantapuram, (Tiruvaṉantapuram, the capital of Kerala State) which the Āḷvār now longs to laud and enjoy. But then, the Lord's names are handy enough to dispel the sins of the chanters of these names and thus remove all the impediments in the way of their achieving the desired objective. Among the several meanings, conveyed by the holy name ' Keśava ', the one which would be most apt in the present context, is: the destroyer of the horse-shaped fiend, named Keśi, set up by King Kaṃsa to kill Kṛṣṇa, the Divine Child. ' Keśi ', the demon, typifies enemies in general and the mere mention of the name of the Lord, denoting His destruction of just one enemy, that is, Keśi, is enough to destroy all our enemies, that is all our sins, that stand between us and the Lord. Did not the single offender (Rāvaṇa) bring on the destruction of his entire race? It needn't, for a moment, be doubted whether the sins already committed could at all be

wiped off, in this manner, without the sinners getting into the clutches of Yama's hordes, determined to put the former through the tortures of hell. Well, here is the magic, namely, spelling the word 'Keśava', which at once keeps Yama's agents out of bounds and there is no question of their coming anywhere near us. Here is a single remedy, the panacea for all ills and evils, unlike the scriptural prescription of different methods of atonement of different types of sins.

(ii) Yama is, no doubt, the agent appointed by God for punishing the law-breakers, the laws being the Śāstras, with their decrees and injunctions. But those, who are engaged in the service of the Lord in His worshippable form, wrapt in ecstatic contemplation of the Lord exquisitely manifest in His image, will certainly be out of the purview of Yama's punishment, if they departed from the punctual and rigid observance of the Śāstraic routine. This was clearly elucidated by the illustrious Bhaṭṭārya, one evening when Lord Raṅganātha was moving by the river-side, during one of the annual festivals, entailing excursions outside the holy city of Arañkam. When a few of the Brahmin attendants expressed their intention to retire for performing the evening prayer (Sandhyāvandhana), Bhaṭṭārya observed :

"Brothers, in our present occupation, namely, absorbing attention to our Sovereign Lord Himself, of exquisite charm, visibly present here, if we skip the religious routine, just this evening, know that we are occupied with the Law-Giver Himself. Surely, Yama will not construe this as a transgression and accuse us as law-breakers, liable for punishment. Supposing a king holds court to hear reports of the financial working of the various departments of his kingdom and, in the course of hearing, adverse mention is made of a favourite of the king. If the king orders the reporter to skip over that particular item and pass on to the next, will the reporter thenceforward dare to revert to that item, deliberately skipped over by the king, and point the accusing finger at the king's favourite? When we are here, busy with the king directly, what other business can draw us away from Him? All ordinary law is set aside before the Lord Who is the highest Law Himself".

iṉṟu pōyp pukutirākil, eḻumaiyum ētam cārā:
kuṉṟu nēr māṭam māṭē kuruntu cēr cerunti, puṉṉai,
maṉṟu alar poḻil aṉantapuranakar māyaṉ nāmam
oṉṟum ōr āyiramām; uḷḷuvārkku umpar ūrē. (X-2-2)

Translation

Sins shall not get near you for generations,
If You'd this day get into Aṉantapuram with gardens fine,
Holding stately trees and castles tall, rising like mountains;
A single name of the Lord, enshrined there, is as potent
As a thousand names and for those, who that name do chant,
That holy Centre becomes the very Heaven indeed.

Notes

(i) "The name of the Lord at Aṉantapuram shall by itself extend unto you protection, on all fronts. If you'd only get into that holy centre, sins shall not come near you, not only now but in all successive births", this is how the Āḻvār exhorts the people around. The mere mention of the name of the Lord, enshrined there, will transform that place into Heaven. Yet another way of interpreting the text of this song is that one need not even go to Aṉantapuram, as such, but one is assured of heavenly ascent, by merely spelling out the name of the Lord enshrined there, a name that is potent enough to fulfil the functions of the other names, as well.

(ii) "*Castles rising like mountains*"—Unlike the ordinary run of man-kind, given to hurrying, those soaked in God-love move about leisurely, enjoying the sight of the high mansions, turrets and towers lining the streets of pilgrim centres, drinking them in, as it were, with their eyes, in rapturous admiration.

ūrum puḻ; koṭiyum aḵtē; ulaku ellām uṇṭu umiḻntāṉ
cērum taṉ aṉantapuram cikkeṉap pukutirākil,
tīrum nōy viṉaikaḷ ellām tiṇṇam; nām aṟiyac coṉṉōm;
pērum ōr āyirattuḷ oṉṟu nīr pēcumiṉē. (X–2–3)

Translation

If You'd only reach Aṉantapuram, cool and lovely, with a mind firm,
Where dwells our Lord Who has Garuḍa as His vehicle
And banner too, Who once ate up the worlds, one and all,
And then spat them out, let me unto you affirm,
You will be rid of all your ills and evils,
Better utter any one of His thousand names.

Note

"Any one of the Lord's thousand (innumerable) names is potent enough to destroy all evils. So then, chant but one such name and get rid of all your sins", exhorts the Āḻvār. The votaries are asked to enter the holy city of Aṉantapuram with firm determination and get their sins destroyed. On reaching the place, no difficult task is set unto them by the Āḻvār; they are required to do nothing more than chant just one of the many holy names of the Lord, the great Deliverer.

pēcumiṉ kūcam iṉṟi-periya nīr vēlai cūḻntu
vācamē kamaḻum cōlai vayal aṇi aṉantapuram
nēcamceytu uṟaikiṉṟāṉai neṟimaiyāl malarkaḷ tūvi,
pūcaṉai ceykiṉṟārkaḷ puṇṇiyam ceytavāṟē. (X–2–4)

Translation

Speak out, with no mental reserve,
What indeed is the penance performed
By those that worship, with choice flowers,
The Lord, who delightfully dwells in Aṉantapuram, well adorned

By fields fertile and gardens full of fragrance sweet
And surrounded by the oceanic waters vast.

Note

The Āḻvār extols those that have the good fortune to worship the Lord at Tiruvaṉantapuram whose gardens are so full of fragrance that it more than offsets the possible stench of the sea around. It is by-no-means surprising that the denizens of the High Heavens, marked by spotless purity and overwhelming devotion to the Lord, worship Him there, in that transcendent setting, with punctilious care and attention. It would, however, be most surprising, rather praiseworthy, if, in this land of dark nescience, quite a few resorted to the worship of the Lord, like unto lotus blooming in the hearth, fed by fire to the brim.

puṇṇiyam ceytu, nalla puṉaloṭu malarkaḷ tūvi,
eṇṇumiṉ entai nāmam; ip piṟappu aṟukkum; appāl,
tiṇṇam nām aṟiyac coṉṉōm-ceṟi poḻil aṉantapurattu
aṇṇalār kamala pātam aṇukuvār amarar āvār. (X–2–5)

Translation

Meditate on the holy names of our Lord
And unto Him offer with devotion supreme,
Water, pure and simple, and flowers fine, to get rid
Of this fell bondage of Samsāra; let me affirm,
Those that get near the lotus feet of our Sire
At Aṉantapuram, with many a garden fine,
Are as good as the Eternal Angels in Heaven.

Note

The Āḻvār exhorts the people to approach the Lord at Aṉantapuram and adore His lotus feet, affirming that, by so doing, they will rise to the stature of the 'Nitya Sūris' in Heaven. By sacramental water for the Lord's worship is meant only water, pure and simple, and not the one spiced and flavoured with cloves and cardamoms, the emphasis being on the easy worshippability of the Lord. Mere meditation on the holy names of the Lord will grind to a halt the dreadful

cycle of birth and death. There is also no restriction whatsoever, in regard to the persons eligible to indulge in meditation. All that is needed is the mere desire to spell out the Lord's holy names. There is scarcely a felicity which the recital of the holy names does not confer and he, who seeks separate means to enable him to recite the Lord's names, is as ludicrous as the one attempting to cleanse himself in a petty pool of brackish water, preparatory to having a dip in the holy Ganga, as the illustrious Bhaṭṭārya would put it. When a man stumbles on the road, at once he cries out 'Ammā!" To cry so, is any qualification needed? No; even so, no special qualification is needed to recite the Lord's holy names.

amararāyt tirikiṉṟārkaṭku āti cēr aṉantapurattu
amarar-kōṉ arccikkiṉṟu; aṅku akap paṇi ceyvar viṇṇōr;
namarkaḷō! collak kēḷmiṉ; nāmum pōy naṇukavēṇṭum–
kumaraṉār tātai tuṉpam tuṭaitta kōvintaṉārē. (X–2–6)

Translation

Worship the Lord, Who the distress did dispel
Of Kumaraṉ's sire, Chief of the Immortals chuckling with pride,
Who in holy Aṉantapuram does lovingly dwell,
Sēṉāpathi Āḷvāṉ, as the head of the Celestials, does lead
And him others from Heaven do ably support;
Ye, my men, listen to what I state,
We too shall that holy band join and adore the Lord.

Notes

(i) Holy Aṉantapuram is to be coveted even more than Heaven, inasmuch as the former attracts even the exalted denizens of Heaven who move down from those dizzy heights and serve the Lord enshrined here. Here then is a pilgrim centre, where parity is enjoyed by the 'Nitya Sūris' of Heaven and the 'Nitya Samsāris', down here. The Lord's face, navel and feet are seen through three separate doors of the Sanctum, catering to three different categories of worshippers, namely, (1) the band of Celestials headed

by Sēṉāpathi Āḷvāṉ to whom the Lord reveals His face through the doorway at one end, (2) Brahmā and other Devas who catch sight of the Lord's navel region through the passage in the middle and (3) people of this world, who worship the Lord's lovely pair of feet through the doorway at the other end. vide aphorism 183 of 'Ācārya Hṛdayam'. As a matter of fact, Sēṉāpathi Āḷvāṉ, who has been assigned the portfolio of administration of the Universe, has to necessarily look at the Lord's face and obtain His approval for the proposals submitted by him, either by word of mouth or merely by His gestures and looks. Again, Brahmā, who emerged from the Lord's navel, sees the Lord's navel region at Aṉantapuram through the middle gate. We, worldlings, seeking refuge at the Lord's feet, see His feet through the end-gate.

(ii) Surely, the Lord, Who dispels the distress of even Śiva, the father of Subrahmaṇya and the other Devas, full of egotism, will certainly deliver us, the selfless lovers.

tuṭaitta kōvintaṉārē, ulaku, uyir, tēvum, maṟṟum
paṭaitta em parama mūrtti, pāmpu-aṇaip paḷḷi koṇṭāṉ,
maṭaittalai vāḷai pāyum vayal aṇi aṉantapuram
kaṭaittalai ciykkappeṟṟāl, kaṭuviṉai kaḷaiyalāmē. (X–2–7)

Translation

Your deadly sins will get dissolved if you'd resort
To Aṉantapuram, which fields fertile do adorn,
And clean up the door-step of the temple where reclines
On serpent-bed, the Lord Supreme who dissolved the worlds
And then put them back into the respective folds.

Notes

(i) The Āḷvār affirms that those, who render service unto the Lord reclining at Tiru-Aṉantapuram, will get rid of their age-long sins, however deadly they might be. Of the several kinds of service, prominence is given to cleaning up the temple gates and keeping the temple front, bright and tidy.

(ii) The wiping off of the worlds, that is, the Lord's act of dissolution or destruction of the Sportive Universe, 'Līlā Vibhūti' is mentioned first and then the creation. This is because Vedāntas speak of dissolution first. As a matter of fact, the 'Samsāra' or the cycle of birth and rebirth is much-too-old and its beginning is just not known. The dissolution is but eating up all the worlds, with their contents and sustaining them all, inside the Lord's stomach, from being swept off by the whirling waters of the Deluge. Creation is but spitting them out, at the end of the Deluge and putting things back in their respective folds.

kaṭuviṉai kaḷaiyalākum; kāmaṉaip payanta kāḷai
iṭavakai koṇṭatu eṉpar, eḻil aṇi aṉantapuram;
paṭam uṭai aravil paḷḷi payiṉṟavaṉ pātam kāṇa
naṭamiṉō, namarkaḷ uḷḷīr!–nām umakku aṟiyac coṉṉōm.

(X–2–8)

Translation

Go and behold, my men! the lovely pair of feet of our Lord,
The mighty Sire of Kāman, Who has pretty Ānantapuram as His abode,
Who does on a Cobra with many a hood recline;
That you may be rid of your deadly sins,
I do, unto you all, make this known.

Notes

(i) Saint Nammāḻvār exhorts the pious Vaiṣṇavas around, to proceed to holy Aṉantapuram and behold the lovely feet of the Lord, reclining there on serpent-couch. The form, this exhortation assumes, is noteworthy; even as people are proceeding towards the holy centre, their deadly sins fall off, this is how the Āḻvār puts it.

(ii) Here is an interesting anecdote; Maṇakkāl Nampi, the preceptor of Āḷavantār (Yāmunācārya) had taught the distinguished disciple all but Yoga Śastra, which was deliberately left over, to be taught by a great Yogi, by name Kurukaikkāvalappaṉ. When Āḷavantār approached the Yogi in question for learning from

him the Yogic secrets, the latter fixed up a date on which Āḷavantār was to meet the preceptor again and start receiving instructions in Yoga. The appointed date was duly noted in a small scrap of paper and it was kept by Āḷavantār in safe custody. But then, the 'Tirumoḻi' and 'Tiruvāymoḻi' festivals, each of ten days' duration, went on at a stretch in Śrīraṅgam, with the special service of the Arayar, the temple minstrel, in the holy presence of Lord Raṅganātha. Āḷavantār was an active participant, being at the head of the distinguished gathering of listeners. When this particular song was recited with great emphasis by the Arayar, facing Āḷavantār, the latter reacted so well that he at once set out for Aṉantapuram along with his disciples. As Nampiḷḷai would put it, Āḷavantār reacted, as above, because that was the surest way of securing contact, rather, becoming associated with Nammāḻvār, within the meaning of the phrase "My men" (Namarkaḷ), occurring in this song. Well, one of those days, when he was staying in holy Aṉantapuram worshipping Lord Padmanābha, Āḷavantār recollected that he was to meet Kurukaikkāvalappaṉ, the Yoga instructor and looked up the chit, in his custody. It so happened that it was the very day on which he had to meet the Yogi and Āḷavantār heaved a sigh of grief, saying, "What a pity! I have not got a special vehicle to transport me just now!"

nām umakku aṟiyac coṉṉa nāḷkaḷum naṇiya āṉa;
cēmam naṉku uṭaittuk kaṇṭīr, ceṟi poḻil aṉantapuram;
tūmam, nal virai malarkaḷ tuvaḷ aṟa āyntukoṇṭu,
vāmaṉaṉ aṭikku eṉṟu ētta, māyntu aṟum viṉaikaḷ-tāmē.

(X–2–9)

Translation

The days, I spoke to you about, are drawing near,
Here's Aṉantapuram, You see, with orchards fine, our haven safe,
Do go there with choice flowers and incense pure

For Lord Vāmana's worship and meditate; Your sins will fall off
By themselves, I am quite sure.

Notes

The Āḻvār has already stated, vide IX-10-5, that he will reach the Heaven, the destined Land, at the end of the current span of life, as vouchsafed to him by the Lord at Tirukkaṇṇapuram. He now reverts to that and says that the crucial day of his departure from this world is drawing near and invites the worldlings to listen to his advice and prosper. Once he departs from this world, who else is there to tender such wholesome advice and even if there be yet another, who will listen to him? This is precisely how Lord Kṛṣṇa advised Yudhiṣṭira to go and receive instructions in the intricacies of morality and ethical values, at the feet of Bhīṣmâcâr, who lay on his death-bed made up of arrows, awaiting the dawn of Uttarāyaṇa for giving up his mortal coil.

Lord Kṛṣṇa, though an Avatāra Himself, exhorted Yudhiṣṭira to learn all truths from Bhīṣma. The Lord is Truth itself and yet, He would go unheard by the commonalty; at any rate, He may not be heard as well as they listen to the Truth-seers (Tatva Darśis). That is why He told Arjuna, vide Bhagavad Gita, IV-34, " By prostrations, by fair questioning and by reverential service to Truth-seeing Saints, learn, for they shall teach you wisdom ". As a matter of fact, all spiritual teaching has value only when it proceeds from recognised authority. One Pariñai Appar used to quote Parāśara Bhaṭṭar's observation in this regard, as follows : " Unless the custodian of an article is a person of worth, the article loses value, both in the hands of the giver and the taker."

māyntu aṟum viṉaikaḷ-tāmē, mātavā! eṉṉa; nāḷum
ēynta poṉ matiḷ aṉantapuranakar entaikku eṉṟu,
cāntoṭu viḷakkam, tūpam, tāmarai malarkaḷ nalla
āyntu koṇṭu, ētta vallār-antam il pukaḻiṉārē. (X-2-10)

Translation

All your sins will go off, on their own, when you utter
The name ' Mātavaṉ '; undying fame shall in them vest that offer
With ardour great, fine sandal paste, lamp and incense and gather
Lotus flowers nice, for the diurnal worship of the Lord
At holy Aṉantapuram, the city bounded by walls of solid gold.

Notes

(i) The name, ' Mātavaṉ ', (Mādhava) denotes the Lord, in conjunction with Mahālakṣmi, the Divine Mother and it is but natural that all our miseries die off, when we ejaculate the Lord's name, betokening this highly benevolent combination of our eternal Father and Mother.

(ii) Serving the Lord with due ceremonies and worshipping Him uninterruptedly, free from distractions, in the High Heavens, is by-no-means a matter of surprise, because that is the land of unalloyed bliss and beatitude, rid of all impediments to the continual meditation and worship of the Lord. Unlike the denizens of the High Heavens, who hold an unbroken rapport with the Lord, the inexhaustible fountain of bliss, here, in this land of darkness and nescience, with its numerous distractions, if there are at least some who procure, with great care and devotioin, choice materials with which to worship the Lord in His worshippable Form, it is indeed a matter for great surprise; surely, these are men of undying fame, indeed.

antam il pukaḻ aṉantapuranakar āti-taṉṉaik
koṇṭu alar poḻil kurukūr māṟaṉ col āyirattuḷ
aintiṉōṭu aintum vallār aṇaivar, pōy amar ulakil,
paintoṭi maṭantaiyar-tam vēy maru tōḷ-iṇaiyē. (X-2-11)

Translation

Those that can recite these songs ten,
Out of the thousand composed by Caṭakōpaṉ
Of Kurukūr, with orchids fine, adoring the Lord of everlasting fame,
Who has His abode in lovely Aṉantapuram,
Shall attain Heaven at the end of the current span
And there be entertained by the damsels fine
With bamboo-like arms, bedecked with jewels nice.

Notes

(i) In the preceding song, the Āḻvār extolled those who worship the Lord at Aṉantapuram, as men of undying fame; now, he is referring to the Lord as of undying fame. Even as the pious men of this world have surpassed the fame of the denizens of Heaven, the Lord, in His worshippable Form in this abode, excels His own transcendent glory in the High Heaven. Whereas all those, in the high Heaven, have the true knowledge of their essential nature as the Lord's exclusive vassals, totally dependent on Him, here, in this abode, there are myriads of men straying away from God, oblivious of their true relationship with Him. Does it not, therefore, redound to His great glory, right here, when He tries to wean away the errant mortals, gone astray? But for His tender solicitude and redemptive grace, these poor souls would be drifting farther and farther away from Him.

(ii) What is alluded to, in this end-song, as the benefit accruing from the recital of this decad, is not the sensual pleasure enjoyable by the chanters on their attaining Heaven through the 'Apsaras', the lovely damsels over there. Indeed, there is no touch of carnality, the skin-deep variety of entertainment, in that blissful land and the entertainment offered by these damsels who play host to the new-comers to Heaven, is the same as that referred to later in X-9-6, 7 and 10.

Tenth Centum—Third Decad (X-3)
(Vēy maru tōḷ iṇai)

Preamble

The Āḻvār, who longed, in the preceding song, for the felicity of divine service unto the Lord at Tiru-Aṉantapuram, accompanied by the pious band of Śrī Vaiṣṇavas, was struck down by a deep sense of frustration, when his aspiration did not materialise. So deep was his frustration indeed, that it led him to suspect the frightful possibility of the Lord perpetuating his bondage and prolonging his stay in this abode. Of course, such an apprehension is not out of place, when one sees the notoriety of the material contact (body), with its great potentiality for mischief, on the one hand, and the Lord's unbridled independence (Svātantarya), on the other. The Āḻvār, however, expresses his apprehension, in an indirect way in this decad, instead of putting it to the Lord, point-blank. He cloaks his own misgivings by referring to the misgivings, entertained by the shepherdesses of Virundāvan, who started nagging Kṛṣṇa, the naughty cow-herd boy, even in the early hours of the morning, the pre-dawn period. No doubt, He was still lying in bed on the crucial morning but He used to leave his bed, by about this time, and take the cattle out for the pasture. The same sequence prevails this morning also, that is, the cool breeze is blowing, the Koels have started cooing, the peacocks are strutting about and the herds of cows and calves are seen spread out, all over the place. So great is His loving care for the Cattle that He would surely follow and tend them, relegating to the background His concern for the Gopīs who cannot, however, brook His separation, even for a short while. And so, the Gopīs conclude that Kṛṣṇa would not make any exception on this particular morning and stay behind. Their minds get agitated over the certainty of Kṛṣṇa's departure from their midst, to such an extent that they start experiencing the pangs of separation even when He is very much by their side. One of them would lustily plead with Him that He shall not leave them and go out into the fields, firstly, because they cannot bear being apart from Him for a whole day, which actually looms like ages in their aching minds, and secondly, because of the lurking danger to His life at the hands of Kamsa's evil spies and agents who keep on masquerading, in one form or another, all over the place.

This decad, however, ends on a jubilant note, with a sense of clarity induced by the Lord's assurance to the Gopīs that He shall not depart from their midst. He tells them: " What indeed is the amazing extent of your love for Me! You should pine for Me, only when I am away from you but I am still by your side ". So saying, the Lord casts His bewitching smiles on the Gopīs, in token of His appreciation of the exuberance of their love for Him. Reference to the red lips, sporting this smile which is quite reassuring, is made in the tenth song of this decad. With this assurance, the Āḻvār's misgivings also stand cleared up, a clarity induced by the Lord Himself.

If our ancient preceptors referred to IX-9, as ' Evening brawl ', they did label this decad, as ' Morning squabble '.

vēy maru tōḷ-iṇai meliyum, ālō!
    melivum, eṉ taṉimaiyum, yātum nōkkāk
kāmaru kuyilkaḷum kūvum, ālō!
    kaṇa mayil-avai kalantu ālum, ālō!
ā maruvu iṉa nirai mēykka nī pōkku
    oru pakal āyiram ūḻi, ālō!
tāmaraik kaṇkaḷkoṇṭu īrti, ālō!
    takavilai takavilaiyē nī kaṇṇā! (X-3-1)

Translation

Alas! my bamboo-like arms have thinned down,
Lean and lonely am I but You take no note of it ;
The pretty koels coo and the peacocks strut about,
If you'd the cattle follow for grazing and remain
Away from us a whole day, it looks a thousand aeons,
Your lotus eyes do our minds attract and oppress,
Surely, Oh, Kaṇṇā, You shed not your grace on us.

Note

The Koels coo the love-songs and the peacocks are seen strutting about; Kṛṣṇa is still in bed, but He is sure to leave shortly for the grazing fields, along with the cattle, and the prospect of separation from Him, a little hence, is so dreadful that the Gopīs have already begun to feel the pangs of separation, as if Kṛṣṇa has already left. It is a terrific

gloom that has descended on the Gopīs; the arms, that would gladly embrace the Lord, have already lost their vitality and thinned down. They cannot brook separation from Him, even for a trice, which looms like a whole Yuga, in their eyes c.f. 'thṛḍi yugāyate tvāmapaśyathām' (Gopikā Gita). Well, Kṛṣṇa tells them that He is very much by their side and yet, they fancy that He has already left and, after all, He will be back home in the evening. But the day is too long a wait and it looks drawn out, as far as ages. The Lord is by-no-means insensitive to the exuberance of love of His girl-companions, and, overawed by the enormity of their love for Him, He casts His bewitching looks at them, which again torment them in the present context. No wonder then, that, in their present irreconcilable mood, the love-intoxicated damsels dub Kṛṣṇa, as one totally devoid of grace.

takavilai takavilaiyē nī kaṇṇā!
    taṭa mulai puṇartoṟum, puṇarccikku ārac
cukavel̤ḷam vicumpu iṟantu,aṟivai mūḻkkac
    cūḻntu, atu kaṉavu eṉa nīṅki, āṅkē
aka uyir akam-akamtōṟum uḷ pukku,
    āviyiṉ param alla vēṭkai, antō!
mika mika iṉi uṉṉaip pirivaiāmāl,
    vīva, niṉ pacu nirai mēykkap pōkkē. (X-3-2)

Translation

Oh, Kaṇṇa, indeed You are devoid of grace ;
When my breasts are locked in Your sweet embrace,
Every moment is a spate of bliss which soars
Much beyond the skies and my sense it blurs ;
But then it passes like a dream and does my desire induce,
Which thro' the vital pores of my life does pierce
And far exceeds the potential of my soul, alas!
Lest you should from us be apart, every now and then,
Desist You should from grazing the cows, please listen.

Notes

(i) Just to placate the love-intoxicated Gopīs, Śrī Kṛṣṇa repeatedly embraced them. Pleasurable in the extreme

though, it only aggravated their misery, as they were tormented by the almost immediate prospect of separation from Him. It is this grief that is voiced forth now.

(ii) Finding that attempts, made by Him to pacify the Gopīs, have only intensified their grief, He asks them what exactly they want Him to do. Pat comes the request from them that He should no more follow the cattle to the grazing meadows and leave them alone.

vīvaṉ, niṉ pacu-nirai mēykkap pōkku;
vevvuyir koṇṭu eṉatu āvi vēmāl;
yāvarum tuṇai illai; yāṉ iruntu uṉ
añcaṉa mēṉiyai āṭṭam kāṇēṉ;
pōvatu aṉṟu oru pakal, nī akaṉṟāl;
poru kayal kaṇ-iṇai nīrum nillā;
cāvatu-iv āykkulattu āycciyōmāyp
piṟanta it toḻuttaiyōm taṉimai-tāṉē. (X-3-3)

Translation

When into the fields the cattle You follow, my life shall be gone,
The hot sigh of grief burns out my Soul,
Companion have I none but I keep lingering still,
I see not the movement of Your form of collyrium complexion,
When you are away, the day looks like ages drawn,
Tears swell up my eyes, may these lowly ones,
Born as shepherdesses in this clan,
Be rid of the pangs of separation!

Notes

(i) *Kṛṣṇa*: "You, girls, want me to stay at home all the time, but how can I do so, without discharging my duty, as a shepherd, namely, tending the cattle?"

Gopī: "Could you, in the discharge of your so-called duty, kill us? Killing women is even more heinous than slaying men. Separation from you means certain death for us and perhaps, You, who slew Thāṭakā and Pūthanā, do not mind killing us, as well. You would

surely realise our plight if you did but once behold your exquisite form, standing in front of a mirror".

(ii) "*Companion have I none*": "Our unique guide, friend and companion that you are, You do not oblige us with your company; my mates are withering away like me while the Koels and peacocks are out to kill me."

(iii) "*I keep lingering still*": When the Lord is away, the Gopī just lingers behind, worn-out and emaciated. It was Lord Kṛṣṇa's presence, by his side, that crowned Arjuna with fame and victory. But after the Lord went back to the Celestium, poor Arjuna, the famous archer, who was known to wield Gāṇḍiva, the bow, with great ease and success, could not even lift it and fared miserably in an encounter with some robbers. The ambidexter, that he was before, he has now lost the power of his arm with Lord Kṛṣṇa no more by his side.

(iv) "*Let us be rid of the pangs of Separation*": The Gopīs display the same ingenuity as Sāvitri did. When asked by Yama to demand anything except handing back Satyavān to her, Sāvitri outwitted Yama by making him grant her the boon of begetting a hundred sons through Satyavān, regaining her husband, Satyavān, in the process. Even so, the Gopī tells Kṛṣṇa: "It is up to you to graze the cows or stay at home. I don't want to impose any condition and all that I want is that we, damsels, born in this clan of Yours, should be rid of separation from You".

Toḻuttaiyōm taṉimaiyum, tuṇai pirintār
tuyaramum niṉaikilai, kōvintā! niṉ
toḻuttaṉil pacukkaḷaiyē virumpi,
tuṟantu emmai iṭṭu, avai mēykkap pōti;
paḻutta nal amutiṉ iṉ cāṟṟu veḷḷam
pāviyēṉ maṉam-akamtōṟum uḷpukku
aḻutta, niṉ ceṅkaṉi vāyiṉ kaḷvap
paṇimoḻi niṉaitoṟum, āvi vēmāl. (X-3-4

Translation

Oh, Kōvintā, You think not of the loneliness of we, lowly ones
And the pangs we suffer when you from us depart ;
Tend you do the cows in Your yard and us You desert,
From Your lips, like unto a red fruit, words do run,
Sweet like nectar, pure and seasoned, and go deep down
This sinner's heart; alas! these are but hollow,
Whenever we think of it, our spirits are bathed in sorrow.

Note

Lord Kṛṣṇa tried to disabuse the Gopis, by saying: "My darlings, is there such a thing as my departing from Your midst and even if I am away, for a while, can I forget You, for a moment? I am very much alive to your overwhelming love for me and if at all I take the cows out to the pastures, it is because I am duty bound to do the work assigned to me, by my parents. But be sure, it is only my body that is away from you, while my spirit always abides in you". Sweet-sounding though, the girls take these words with but a pinch of salt. They do not assess Kṛṣna's assertions and assurance at their face value. Apprehending that it is mere eye-wash, they feel terribly agitated.

paṇimoḻi niṉaitoṟum, āvi vēmāl-
pakal nirai mēykkiya pōya kaṇṇā!
piṇi aviḻ mallikai vāṭai tūva,
peru mata mālaiyum vantiṉṟu, ālō!
maṇi miku mārpiṉil mullaippōtu eṉ
vaṉa mulai kamaḻvittu, uṉ vāy amutamtantu,
aṇi miku tāmaraik kaiyai, antō!-
aṭicciyōm talaimicai nī aṇiyāy! (X-3-5)

Translation

Your soothing words put our hearts in jitters
As we recollect them Oh, Kaṇṇā, You did the cows go after
The whole day; the evening has arrived with gusto great
And it does the fragrance of Jasmine, in full bloom, waft,

Let my comely breasts enjoy the lavender scent on Your winsome chest
And my lips the nectar from yours, put Your lovely lotus hand
On our lowly heads and affirm, the cows You'd no more tend.

Note

Even when Kṛṣṇa is by their side, the Gopis say that He has gone already to the grazing meadow. What is even worse, they fancy that He has been away from them for a whole day and it is evening already, with its characteristic environments. In their exuberance of love, they find what actually is the early morn, transposed into the evening with the chill breeze, laden with the fragrance of the jasmine. No wonder, they now pass through all those pangs experienced by them, in IX-9 ante. The sudden appearance of the evening breeze, cruel and tormenting, is likened to Rāvaṇa, come in the disguise of a hermit, before Sitā at Pañcavaṭi. Finding the Gopi in such a plight, Lord Kṛṣṇa asks her what exactly He should do by her and her reply is, as in the last three lines of this song. Śrī Kūrattāḻvāṉ's "Manmūrti hantha! karapallava thallajamte Kurvan Kathā Kṛtamanoratayiṣyase mām", in his "Śrivaikuṇṭa Sthava", is the exact reproduction of "put your lovely lotus hands on our lowly heads", occurring in this song.

aṭicciyōm talaimicai nī aṇiyāy-
āḻi am kaṇṇā! uṉ kōlap pātam;
piṭittu atu naṭuvu uṉakku arivaiyarum
palar; atu niṟka, em peṇmai āṟṟōm;
vaṭitaṭam kaṇ-iṇai nīrum nillā;
maṉamum nillā: emakku atu-taṉṉālē,
veṭippu niṉ pacu-nirai mēykkap pōkku;
vēm, ematu uyir-aḻal meḻukil ukkē. (X-3-6)

Translation

Oh, Kaṇṇā, the lovely-eyed! put your pretty hand on our lowly heads,
May be that where You go, many a lady, dear unto you, might hold

And massage Your lovely feet, but we, at this end, cannot contain
Our feminity and endure, tears well up like a fountain
In our eyes sharp, our minds are under tension great
And therefore even for a moment You shall not from us be apart;
Your grazing the cows can on us work havoc great,
Our spirits thaw down like unto wax on fire set.

Note

The Gopīs insist that Kṛṣṇa shall not go after the cattle but stay behind, seeing that they just can't subsist without Him. While their spirits will get burnt out like wax, set on fire, their strength of mind is next to nothing and cannot, therefore, avert the catastrophe. Whereas there may be many a girl of comely shape to attend on Him when He is away from them, He is unto the Gopis, their sole Sustainer and without Him they cannot subsist.

vēm, ematu uyir aḻal meḻukil ukku-
 veḷ vaḷai, mēkalai kaḻaṉṟu vīḻa,
tū malark kaṇ-iṇai muttam cōra,
 tuṇai mulai payantu eṉa tōḷkaḷ vāṭa,
mā maṇi vaṇṇā! uṉ ceṅkamala vaṇṇa
 mel malar aṭi nōva nī pōy,
ā makiḻntu ukantu, avai mēykkiṉṟu, uṉṉōṭu
 acurarkaḷ talaippeyyil, evaṉkol āṅkē? (X–3–7)

Translation

The bangles rest not on my wrists nor the saree around my waist,
Pearls of tears run down my lotus eyes and on my breasts,
The bloom is gone, my shoulders fade out, Oh, Kaṇṇā of sapphire hue!
When into the forests, tending the cows with great delight, You move,
Your delicate red lotus feet aching quite a lot,

Apprehending the evil Kamsa's agents might on You inflict,
My spirit burns up as does the wax when on fire set.

Note

The Gopi sobs out: "Oh, Kṛṣṇa, we, on our part, suffer the pangs of separation from You, what with our thinning down terribly, losing our natural bloom and lustre and so on. But don't you see that you tread over hill and dale on bare feet, feet which are too delicate to be pressed even by our soft hands, aching a great deal? What is even worse is the route you follow, leaving it all to the whimsical cows that lead you on to fields, far and wide, thereby exposing You to Kamsa's nefarious agents who are out to destroy You. Every blade of grass, every stone, You tread upon, is Your enemy, in disguise, set on you by the scheming King Kamsa".

acurarkaḷ talaippeyyil, evaṉkol āṅku? eṉṟu
 āḻum eṉ ār uyir; āṉ piṉ pōkēl;
kacikaiyum vēṭkaiyum uḷkalantu,
 kalaviyum naliyum; eṉ kaikaḻiyēl;
vaciccey uṉ tāmaraik kaṇṇum, vāyum,
 kaikaḷum, pīṭaka uṭaiyum kāṭṭi,
ociccey nuṇ iṭai iḷa āycciyar, nī
 ukakkum nallavaroṭum uḻitarāyē. (X–3–8)

Translation

With fear does my dear life quiver what unto you might befall,
When You are away, tending the cattle; You'll do well
Not to go behind the cows, Oh, Kaṇṇā, better stay here,
Leave me not, lest my boundless love for You shall thro' every pore
Pierce poor me; I'd rather not mind Your flirting right here
With those other thin-waisted damsels You love whom You rope
Thro' Your lotus eyes, hands and feet and Your silken robe.

Note

Then Kṛṣṇa retorted that it was not merely a matter of His tending the cows but also His fulfilling His engagements

with those other ladies, as the Gopis had themselves hinted at. Here then is the interesting, rather impressive reply of the Gopi. She says: " All that I want is that You should be right in our presence. As a compromise, I would not even mind Your flirting with those other ladies of your heart, right here. You don't have to go or send some one to fetch them. Your entrancing looks and Your sweet voice shall bring them unto you, your loving hands shall gather the bashful ones up and your silken robe shall obstruct those, bent down in the exhilaration of your touch and pull them upwards. Well, these constitute the messengers in question. It will suffice if you just put aside your upper garment and expose Your exquisite charm ".

ukakkum nallavaroṭum uḷitantu, uṉ-taṉ
tiruvuḷḷam iṭar keṭumtōṟum, nāṅkaḷ
viyakka iṉpuṟutum; em peṇmai āṟṟōm;
em perumāṉ! pacu mēykkap pōkēl!
mikap pala acurarkaḷ vēṇṭu uruvam koṇṭu,
niṉṟu uḷitaruvar, kañcaṉ ēva;
akappaṭil, avaroṭum niṉṉoṭu āṅkē
avattaṅkaḷ viḷaiyum; eṉ col koḷ antō! (X-3-9)

Translation

My Lord, we are not the jealous sort that shall disdain
Your making love unto others; when you do in their company revel,
Elated we too shall be; You shall, therefore, refrain
From grazing the cows, there is also the lurking evil
Of Kamsa's agents roaming about in forms unknown,
When You are with them in encounter locked, what will happen,
Alas! I can't say; do not follow the cows, unto my advice do listen.

Notes

(i) Kṛṣṇa was in no mood to swallow the Gopī's statement, in the preceding song, that she would allow Him to flirt with other ladies, right in front of her. He thought it was a mere ruse to keep him back, as it was against

their grain to suffer gladly Kṛṣṇa making love to other ladies, and that too, in their presence. He put it straight to the Gopi that He couldn't bring Himself to believe their so-called tolerance and accept their statement, at its face value. The Gopī now avers that the pleasure, derived by beholding the bliss enjoyed by Him in the company of those other ladies, was indeed much greater than what they could have by their union with Him. If the Lord takes greater delight in mingling with those other ladies than with the Gopīs, the latter would also share the Lord's delight which is paramount. In short, the Lord's delight is theirs and they have no delight of their own. It is of course a natural failing of any woman, judged by common place standards, to be terribly intolerant of her Lord sharing the connubial love with any other lady. But here, in the case of the Gopis, their God-love transcends their feminity when the latter clashes with the Lord's own delight which, it may be reiterated, is of paramount consideration. So then, here again is a clear enunciation of the highest moral value, in its crystallised form, vide also II-9, III-3 and VIII-10. These have been juxtaposed in aphorism 211 of Ācārya Hṛdayam.

(ii) Kṛṣṇa, however, insisted that He went into the forests to graze the cows, purely as a matter of religious duty and that He had no love-affair with any one on the way, as they apprehended. The Gopis were sporting enough to accept the Lord's statement and even so, they could not but emphasise the danger to His life at the hands of Kamsa's aides, as Kamsa deployed agents all over the place, capable of assuming, at will, any form by way of eluding Kṛṣṇa, their target. The Gopīs would want Kṛṣṇa to stay back, at least on this ground.

avattaṅkaḷ viḷaiyum; eṉ col koḷ, antō!
acurarkaḷ vaṉ kaiyar, kañcaṉ ēva
tavattavar maṟuka niṉṟu uḷitaruvar;
taṉimaiyum peritu uṉakku; irāmaṉaiyum

uvarttalai, uṭan tirikilaiyum eṉṟu eṉṟu,
ūṭuṟa eṉṉuṭai āvi vēmāl;
tivattilum pacu- nirai mēyppu uvatti;
ceṅkaṉi vāy eṅkaḷ āyar tēvē! (X–3–10)

Translation

With lips like red fruit, Oh, gem of our shepherd clan,
Putting aside Balarāmaṉ, You move about all alone,
Many a formidable Asura, set upon by Kamsa, roams about,
Terrifying the sages, my blood boils when I think of it,
My words, alas! may You deign to listen,
I see You relish grazing cows better than Your stay in Heaven.

Notes

Kṛṣṇa to Gopīs: " Your misgivings are totally unwarranted; it is because of your overwhelming love for Me that you entertain such baseless fears. Nothing will happen to Me, be sure ".

Gopīs to Kṛṣṇa: " You are so charming, Oh, Kṛṣṇa, that we apprehend evil eyes will cast their spell on you. The Asuras, who stalk the forests, are doubly ferocious, bent upon carrying out Kamsa's sinister designs on You. Even sages are in constant dread of the evil that might befall You. It is a great pity, You choose to move alone, putting aside Your benevolent brother, Balarāmaṉ. As we think of all these, our hearts literally go up in flames ".

Kṛṣṇa to Gopīs: " How amazing is your love indeed? Why should You entertain such fears, when I am in Your midst?" So saying, He casts the bewitching spell of His smiles on them.

Gopīs to Kṛṣṇa: " You just kill us with your smiles, putting us off the track. We know your irresistible partiality for grazing the cows, an act you relish better than even staying in Heaven. Even on the Yonder side of Heaven, You will carry the pleasant memory of the pastures over here and utter in Your dream, the commands to the cows "ḍiyo, ḍiyo ".

ceṅkaṉi vāy eṅkaḷ āyar tēvu at
tiruvaṭi tiruvaṭimēl, porunal
caṅku aṇi tuṟaivaṉ vaṉ teṉ kurukūr
vaṉ caṭakōpaṉ col āyirattuḷ
maṅkaiyar āycciyar āynta mālai
avaṉoṭum pirivataṟku iraṅki, taiyal
aṅku avaṉ pacu-nirai mēyppu oḻippāṉ,
uraittaṉa ivaiyum pattu avaṟṟiṉ cārvē. (X–3–11)

Translation

These songs ten, out of the thousand of Kurukūr Caṭakōpaṉ,
Reverently offered at the feet of the Chief of shepherd clan,
The Lord with red lips, fruit-like, the Gopīs' hymnal outpourings,
The lusty pleadings of a shepherdess to keep Him back from grazing,
So that He may with her always remain,
Shall confer the same benefits as the other decads of this hymnal.

Note

The Shepherdess in question acts as the mouthpiece of the Gopīs, with her remarkable capacity to plead their cause. Even as the Lord stayed with the Gopīs, in deference to their wishes, He will abide in those that chant this decad. Alternately, this decad is well-matched with the other decads of this hymnal and shall bestow the same results as those decads.

Tenth Centum—Fourth Decad (X-4)
(Cārvē tavanṉeṟi)

Preamble

In the preceding decad, the Āḻvār suffered the pangs of separation from the Lord, akin to those experienced by the Gopīs, even when the Lord was in their midst. Just as the Gopīs were placated by Lord Kṛṣṇa, the Āḻvār was pacified by the Lord and his fears were quelled when the Lord assured him

that He would no longer get parted from him. Rid of the fear of prolongation of his bondage, the Āḷvār is now jubilant over the near prospect of his ascent to the Lord's feet in Heaven. He, therefore, gets busy in giving the finishing touches, appropriate to this grand hymnal of unparalleled sweetness and grandeur. He has begun to realise the fruits of the devotion (Bhakti), preached by him to others, right from I-2 and onwards. It may be recalled that Rāvaṇa turned a deaf ear to Vibhīṣaṇa's pious entreaty and advice but it only intensified the latter's devotion which led him on to Rāma's camp itself. This decad sets out how God is attainable through love.

cārvē ṭavaneṟikkut tāmōtaraṉ tāḷkaḷ;
kār mēka vaṇṇaṉ, kamala nayaṉattaṉ,
nīr, vāṉam, maṇ eri, kāl āy niṉṟa nēmiyāṉ,
pēr vāṉavarkaḷ pitaṟṟum perumaiyaṉē. (X-4-1)

Translation

Unto those that tread the loving path of devotion,
Facile indeed are the lovely feet of cloud-hued Tāmōtaraṉ
Of red lotus eyes, who does as the five elements stand,
Who sports the discus, whose glory grand,
The pre-eminent ones in Heaven for ever chant.

Note

The Āḷvār affirms that the lovely feet of Tāmōtaraṉ (Dāmodara, that is, Lord Kṛṣṇa, Who displays His simplicity galore, exhibiting, on His tummy, the scar caused by ther ope tied round it by Mother Yaśodhā) render the pursuit of the path of loving surrender, quite facile–see also I-3-5, where the Āḷvār exhorted the worldlings to stick to the path of loving surrender, imbibing the quintessence of the Lord's own teachings, in His "Song Celestial". When we talk of the Lord having been tied by a rope round the tummy, during His Avatāra as Kṛṣṇa, the cow-herd boy, our bondage of Samsāra goes off. There is a happy blending of supremacy and simplicity in the Lord and He is, therefore, easily worshippable. The Āḷvār sets out, in this song, the Lord's great qualities of head and heart as

well as His exquisite charm. The Lord pervades all things and beings and not merely the five elements of fire, air, water, space and earth, as such.

perumaiyaṉē, vāṉattu imaiyōrkkum; kāṇṭaṟku
arumaiyaṉē, ākattu aṉaiyātārkku; eṉṟum
tiru mey uṟaikiṉṟa ceṅkaṇ māl, nāḷum
irumai-viṉai kaṭintu, iṅku eṉṉai āḷkiṉṟāṉē. (X-4-2)

Translation

Of grandeur great that does surpass the Celestials
In the upper worlds, the Lord is hardly visible
To those that do not in His heart lovingly inhere;
The lotus-eyed Lord, Who holds Tiru, for ever,
On His person, has the fruits wiped out, right here,
Of my acts, good and bad, and on top of that
Enlisted me in His service, day in and day out.

Notes

(i) The felicity, conferred by the Lord's lovely feet on those pursuing the path of loving devotion, was pointed out, in general, in the preceding song. From this song and onwards, the Āḷvār sets out the benefits accrued to him, personally. The Lord has bestowed on the Āḷvār, right here, the felicity of divine service, that is usually attainable in Heaven alone.

(ii) "*Inaccessible to those who do not inhere in His heart*"

The Lord is inaccessible to those who do not bear any love for Him and are, therefore, not eager to envision Him and commune with Him. As a matter of fact, it is only to those on whom His spontaneous grace alights (Paragata svīkāra), that He becomes accessible.

āḷkiṉṟāṉ āḻiyāṉ; ārāl kuṟaivu uṭaiyam?
mīḷkiṉṟatu illai; piṟavit tuyar kaṭintōm;
vāḷ keṇṭai oṇ kaṇ maṭap piṉṉai-taṉ kēḷvaṉ
tāḷ kaṇṭukoṇṭu, ēṉ talaimēl puṉaintēṉē. (X-4-3)

Translation

The Lord, Who the discus wields, did us liberate
From the miseries of birth, once for all; there's none else
Whose help we need, my head I do decorate
With the lovely feet of the bright, fish-eyed Piṉṉai's Spouse.

Note

The Āḷvār's mind is now absolutely clear about the immediate prospect of his ascent to Heaven and so sanguine is he that he asserts that his age-long misery of birth and rebirth is gone and that there is no question of his getting caught up in the dreadful cycle, any more. Even so, a little later, that is, X-10-2, he pleads vehemently with the Lord for the quick consummation of their deeply-longed-for union and even goes to the extent of binding Him and His Consort (Mahā Lakṣmī) on oath, for the accomplishment of the goal in question. Questioned by the Lord Himself, in that context, regarding the propriety of the Āḷvār binding Him and the Divine Mother on oath, the Āḷvār is quick to justify his conduct because of the exuberance of his God-love and his impatience to get at Him.

talaimēl puṉaintēṉ caraṇaṅkaḷ; āliṉ
ilaimēl tuyiṉṟāṉ, imaiyōr vaṇaṅka
malaimēl tāṉ niṉṟu, eṉ maṉattuḷ iruntāṉai,
nilai pērkkal ākāmai niccittu iruntēṉē. (X-4-4)

Translation

Adorned have I my head with the feet of the Lord,
Who did on a fig-leaf repose, Who is by Celestials adored,
Right here, in Mount Tiruvēṅkaṭam, where He just stands,
For Him to secure a berth in my mind,
Where I am sure He now remains firmly enshrined.

Notes

(i) the Āḷvār recounts the manner in which the Lord contrived to get Himself lodged firmly in his heart and how complacent He feels after reaching His coveted destination. The Lord, Who reposed on a tender fig-leaf over the vast expanse of water, stepped on to Mount Tiruvēṅkaṭam, the spring-board from which He jumped into the Āḷvār's heart. When He sustained all the worlds with their contents inside His stomach, resting on the fig-leaf, He was all alone and nobody knew the manner and extent of His benefaction. And so, He hit upon a plan by which He could demonstrate to all the worlds, His great benevolence and omnipotence, amazing simplicity and easy accessibility. It was in pursuance of this plan that He repaired to Mount Tiruvēṅkaṭam, along with the Nitya Sūrīs, the Eternal heroes in Heaven. Once this was accomplished, He moved into the Āḷvār's heart-region and established Himself firmly therein, the ultimate destination of His long travail. Here then is the beautifully phased programme of the Lord's journey to the Āḷvār's heart-centre, which would have just given way under excessive joy, had the Lord stepped on to it straightway.

As a matter of fact, the Lord's attachment to the Gnostic's (Jñāni's) physical form even surpasses His love for the pilgrim centres where He has condescended to shed His grace on His votaries, in 'Arca' (worshippable, iconic Form). This is quite understandable, seeing that the very purpose of His manifestation in 'Arca' Form is only to get hold of His subjects, by some means or the other. And when He gets His catch all right and it is a big haul at that, as in the case of the Āḷvār, His gratification knows no bounds. The Lord's stay in the pilgrim centres is, therefore, not an end in itself but only a means for the reclamation of His subjects, His ultimate destination being the heart-centre of the spiritually regenerated subjects. Once the destination is reached, the means employed for reaching it get relegated to a position of secondary importance. It is then the turn of a devotee like Pēyāḷvār to request the Lord not to relax His interest in the pilgrim centres, which operate as the spring-board whence the Lord could reach His devotees, His ultimate destination. It is now a case of the Lord loving the pilgrim centres, firstly, as places adored by His devotees and secondly,

out of gratitude to those centres for helping Him to reclaim His subjects, by turning them God-ward.

(ii) It is with such a deep yearning that the Lord is firmly ensconced in the heart-centre of the Saint. There is no question of His getting out on His own. Of course, the Āḻvār, endowed with a mind soaked in God-love, will do nothing to unsettle the Lord from His coveted position inside his heart and dislodge Him.

niccittu iruntēṉ eṉ neñcam kaḻiyāmai;
kaic cakkarattu aṇṇal kaḷvam peritu uṭaiyaṉ;
meccappaṭāṉ piṟarkku; meypōlum poy vallaṉ;
naccappaṭum namakku-nākattu aṇaiyāṉē. (X-4-5)

Translation

Sanguine am I that the Lord stays firm in my heart,
My Sire, holding the discus, has many a secret plan I know not,
Disclose He shan't to the impious His qualities great,
True unto the devout, He shall the otherwise delude,
He is our goal indeed, the One lying on serpent-bed.

Notes

(i) The Āḻvār is jubilant that the Lord, Who did all that austere penance for getting at him, namely, lying on the bosom of the waters and standing on the hill-top, is now firmly entrenched in his heart. And what more? There is still so much that the Lord is intending to do for him, which he will get to know, only in due course.

(ii) Whereas the Lord is incessantly pouring unto His devotees, in super-abundance, marvellous communications of His divine nature and the devotees shall, all the time, discover something new, He shall conceal His great qualities of head and heart, so far as the ungodly, impious persons are concerned. While the Saint sings His glory in such a prolific manner, the deluded duds and the ungodly persons hardly possess the necessary equipment for meditating on Him or singing His glory. Though looking impartial and inclined to extend the same treatment to Arjuna and Duryodhana alike, Lord Kṛṣṇa did, in the final analysis, punish the wicked Duryodhana and reward the righteous Arjuna.

(iii) If the Lord rests on Ādiśeṣa, a fellow-devotee of ours and is so intimate with him, it only inspires in us hopes of the possibility of His being intimate with us, as well.

nākattu aṇaiyāṉai, nāḷtoṟum ñāṉattāl
ākattu aṇaipparkku aruḷceyyum ammāṉai,
mākattu iḷa matiyam cērum caṭaiyāṉaip
pākattu vaittāṉ-taṉ pātam paṇintēṉē. (X-4-6)

Translation

Blest am I to adore the feet of the Lord,
Who keeps, on one side of His body, him that sports
On matted locks the crescent Moon, the Sire great,
Who sheds for ever His grace on those
Whose knowledge blooms into love that does embrace,
In their hearts, Him that does on serpent-bed repose.

Notes

(i) What is emphasised here by the Āḻvār is the need for transforming one's knowledge of God into love for Him. Knowledge of God is wisdom's root while love of God is its ripest fruit. In His Song Celestial also, Lord Kṛṣṇa insists on loving meditation. Of-course, He sedulously nurtures the God-love of the devotees to the point of fruition. It would be futile to expect our wandering minds to get fixed on the Lord, all the time, unless His grace alights on us at His sweet volition.

(ii) The tender solicitude of the Lord is indicated here, by pointing out how He has assigned a part of His body to Śiva, who is donning the crescent Moon on matted locks.

paṇi neñcē! nāḷum parama paramparaṉai;
piṇiozrum cārā; piṟavi keṭuttu āḷum–
maṇi niṉṟa cōti, matucūtaṉ, eṉ ammāṉ,
aṇi niṉṟa cempoṉ aṭal āḻiyāṉē. (X-4-7)

Translation

Of splendour great like sapphire is Matucūtaṉ, my Sire,
The One that wields the discus, flamboyant like gold;
The Lord Supreme, Who the miseries of birth dispelled,
And made me His vassal, Worship, my mind, for ever;
That dreadful disease [of Samsāra] shall afflict us, no more.

Note

The Āḻvār exhorts his God-bent mind to worship for ever the Supreme Lord of exquisite charm, the great Deliverer. The Sovereign Lord will cut out all our miseries, right at the source, namely, the cycle of birth and rebirth, where one gets caught up in the whirlpool of Samsāra, a self-perpetuating dreadful disease. Reference to the Lord, as 'Madhusūdha', is significant; even as He destroyed the demons, called Madhu and Kaiṭaba, He will cut out all the impediments standing in the way of our serving Him, of exquisite charm. Blessed indeed are those that behold the Lord, holding the dazzling discus, and drink deep that nectarean charm.

āḻiyāṉ, āḻi amararkkum appālāṉ,
ūḻiyāṉ, ūḻi paṭaittāṉ, nirai mēyttāṉ,
pāḻi am tōḷāl varai eṭuttāṉ pātaṅkaḷ—
vāḻi eṉ neñcē! maṟavātu vāḻkaṇṭāy. (X-4-8)

Translation

Inaccessible is my Lord, Who holds the discus on,
Even to the exalted Celestials; He stayed all alone
During the deluge great, Time and all else He did ordain,
Cows He did tend and save by lifting mount (Govardhan)
On His shoulder, fit and fine; may you, my mind, prosper,

Adoring without fail His lovely feet for ever,
Let me hail indeed this state of affairs.

Notes

(i) The Āḻvār's mind having responded well to his exhortation, in the preceding song, he now pats on its back and calls upon it to adore the Lord's feet without intermission. After all the exertion put forth for achieving the end in view, it is usual for people to relax and rest on their oars, once the destination is reached. It is precisely this common failing that the Āḻvār wants his mind to guard against. He advises it to persevere in its adoration of the Lord's lovely feet, with no break whatever.

(ii) He, who created myriads of things, incarnated as Kṛṣṇa in the shepherd clan, palmed off as Nanda's son, as if He too was created like others. His tending the cows has indeed a special significance. Unable to tend themselves, the cows, as a class, would not resist the Lord's aid and strike a divergent path, as we folks do. Verily, this is the essence of 'Prapatti' or surrender to the Lord's grace—"Bhagavad pravṛtti virodhi svapravṛtti nivṛtti-prapatti".

kaṇṭēṉ kamala malarp pātam; kāṇṭalumē,
viṇṭē oḻinta viṉaiyāyiṉa ellām:
toṇṭē ceytu, eṉṟum toḻutu vaḻiyoḻuka,
paṇṭē paramaṉ paṇitta paṇivakaiyē. (X-4-9)

Translation

Beheld have I the Lord's lotus feet and the moment I saw them,
Root and branch have all my sins been cut out and unto Him
Deep love in me has been engendered; Him I do adore
With no break, true to His dictates, as of old.

Note

The Āḻvār gratefully acknowledges the Lord's spontaneous grace, which enabled him to behold His lotus feet which are not accessible even to the exalted Celestials in the

upper regions, despite rigorous penance for ages. The moment he saw the Lord's lovely feet, all his accumulated sins of ages got blotted out, *in toto*, true to His promise, "Ahaṃ tvā sarva pāpebhyo mokṣayiṣyāmi" (Bhagavad Gita XVIII—66). Although Lord Kṛṣṇa had said, in His 'Song Celestial', no more than this, the Āḻvār, endowed by the Lord himself with spiritual knowledge, full and complete, elucidates the full import of the Lord's promise in question. He says that the word "Mokṣayiṣyāmi" does not mean mere emancipation from bondage, the dreadful cycle of birth and rebirth, but eternal service unto the Lord, as well, in keeping with the subject's essential nature, as the Lord's exclusive vassal.

vakaiyāl maṉam oṉṟi, mātavaṉai nāḷum,
pukaiyāl, viḷakkāl, putu malarāl, nīrāl,
ticaitōṟu amararkaḷ ceṉṟu, iṟaiñca niṉṟa
takaiyāṉ caraṇam tamarkaṭku ōr paṟṟē. (X-4-10)

Translation

There's no haven, so safe and sound, unto the devout,
As the lovely feet of Mātavaṉ, our Sire, sought out
And worshipped by the Celestials, stationed all over,
Who, with a mind duly fixed on Him, offer, ever and anon,
Choice flowers, water, lamp and burn incense fine.

Notes

(i) The Āḻvār concludes this decad by empahsising that the Lord is the one and only Giver, the sole Means for all votaries, irrespective of whether they seek Him out for personal ends or employ other means to attain Him or submit themselves to His loving grace.

(ii) Mādhava holds on His winsome chest His coveted Bride, the Divine Mother, the great intercessor between Man and God. Although the 'Carama Śloka' (Bhagavad Gita XVIII-66) does not contain any direct reference to the Lord's conjunction with Mahā Lakṣmī, the Divine Mother, the Āḻvār would appear to have understood the word 'Ahaṁ', occurring in the second half of the Śloka, to refer to the Lord, in conjunction with Mahā Lakṣmī. Actually, of the three esoteric texts, 'Tirumantra', 'Dvaya' and 'Carama Śloka', the middle one alone contains a specific reference to this holy combination of the Lod and Mahālakṣmi. It should, however, be noted that 'Carama Śloka' is only an elaboration of 'Dvaya', which again elaborates 'Tirumantra'.

paṟṟu oṉṟu paṟṟi, parama paramparaṉai
mal tiṇ tōḷ mālai vaḻuti vaḷaṉāṭaṉ
col-toṭai antāti ōr āyirattuḷ ip pattum
kaṟṟārkku ōr paṟṟākum kaṇṇaṉ kaḻal-iṇaiyē. (X-4-11)

Translation

Unto those that learn these songs ten,
Out of the thousand composed by Vaḻutivaḷanāṭaṉ,*
Who stuck fast, as his haven safe,
To the Supreme Lord with sinewy shoulders, shall be vouchsafed
Kaṇṇaṉ's lovely pair of feet, their destined goal.

* Caṭakōpaṉ

Note

The chanters of this decad shall easily attain the lovely pair of feet of the Supreme Lord, whose omnipotence helps to vanquish all the enemies, the impediments that stand in the way of His ardent devotees attaining Him.

Tenth Centum—Fifth Decad (X-5)
(Kaṇṇaṉ Kaḻal-iṇai)

Preamble

It was out of deep compassion of unique dimensions that Saint Nammāḻvār did, in the midst of his mystic experience, *par excellence*, turn his attention on the people around, from time to time, in order to turn them God-ward. No doubt, he found them distressingly unresponsive and at one stage (*vide* stanza 25

of "Periya Tiruvantāti", the third of Nammāḷvār's four hymnals), he observed that it would be next to impossible to wean away the worldlings, the incorrigibles and make them God-bent. And yet, so great was his tender solicitude that he went on exhorting them to realise the utter futility of worldly possessions and sensual pleasures and take refuge at the lovely feet of the Supreme Lord, Śrīman Nārāyaṇa, the surest and the easiest way of securing release from the bondage of 'Samsāra'. We could see this great gesture of the Āḷvār, in every centum of this grand hymnal, from I-2 onwards. This is, however, the last decad in which he tenders advice to the world around and a little hence, we will see him marching to heaven through the exalted and exhilarating route, known as the 'Arcirādhi mārga', the route of great distinction, earmarked for the released souls, heaven-bound. It is characteristic of the magnanimous elders of great eminence to say a few golden words, on the eve of their exit from this world, by way of parting advice to the near and dear ones around. The Āḷvār, who is overwhelmingly conscious of the Lord's eagerness to lift him up to His Heavenly abode and the almost immediate prospect of his ascent to Heaven, tenders such parting advice in this decad, the very last of the series of lectures, delivered by him, for the edification and elevation of the earth-bound, sense-buried men of the world. c.f. Vibhīṣaṇa's advice to Rāvaṇa, even while leaving Laṅkā, bound for Lord Rāma's Camp—"na naśyanthaṃ upekṣeyam pradiptam śaraṇam yadhā" (Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa, VI-16-22).

The advice conveyed, in this swan-song of the Āḷvār, is short and sweet, the quintessence of 'Tirumantra' and 'Dvaya', calling upon the worldly men to chant Lord Nārāyaṇa's holy name and serve Him, in conjunction with Mahālakṣmī, the Divine Mother, by word (singing), deed (offering choice flowers) and thought (loving meditation), vide aphorism 228 of Ācārya Hṛdayam).

kaṇṇaṉ kaḻal-iṇai naṇṇum maṉam uṭaiyir!
eṇṇum tirunāmam tiṇṇam nāraṇ mē. (X-5-1)

Translation

Nāraṇam is the holy name You have to meditate upon;
Besides this, let me affirm, there's none to reckon,

Take note, Ye, men, yearning for the lovely pair of feet
Of Kaṇṇaṉ, our Lord, [Who is easily accessible to the devout].

Note

In I-2-10, the Āḷvār taught his fellow-beings how to pray, by giving out the substance of the eight-syllabled 'Tirumantra'. The Subject of this 'Mantra' is none other than the Supreme Lord, Nārāyaṇa (used, in short form, as Nāraṇam), the abode of countless souls, of vast excellence and an inexhaustible fountain of bliss. That Nārāyaṇa is the sole Refuge unto those who are desirous of attaining Him, is now re-iterated by the Āḷvār in his valedictory address to the world, at large. No other qualification is needed than the yearning to attain the Lord's lovely pair of feet, for chanting this holy name of His, the great Mantra. As a matter of fact, even the highest degree of attainments, one can have with the utmost exertion, will by-no-means be commensurate with the end in view, namely, enjoyment of heavenly bliss in that Eternal Land whence there is no returning. So then, the only qualification, if at all, is the earnest desire, on the part of the votary, to achieve this highest goal and the one, thus qualified, becomes eligible to chant the holy name, Nārāyaṇa, which delivers the goods, all right. Even so, the Lord is referred to, as Kṛṣṇa in this song, so as to attract the subjects by virtue of His amazing simplicity, instead of scaring them away by emphasising His Supremacy and Sovereignty over the entire universe, His overlordship.

nāraṇaṉ, emmāṉ, pār aṇaṅku āḷaṉ—
vāraṇam tolaitta kāraṇaṉ-tāṉē. (X-5-2)

Translation

Nāraṇaṉ, Our Sire, is Mother Earth's loving Spouse,
The One Who did ordain this vast Universe,
Who destroyed the gigantic elephant
Set upon Him by Kamsa, the great tyrant.

Notes

The Āḷvār is now elaborating the meaning of the word 'Nārāyaṇa', used in a shortened form as 'Nāraṇan', in the preceding song. Mother Earth (Bhū Devī) is one of the three principal Consorts of Lord Nārāyaṇa and reference to Bhū Devī, in this song can be taken to include the two other Consorts as well, 'Śrī' and 'Nīḷā' Devis, in the Celestial setting. "Our Sire" would denote the 'Lord's sovereignty over the 'Līlā Vibhūti', the Sportive Universe, in which we all live. That means, the Lord is depicted as the Sovereign Master of both the 'Nitya' (eternal) and 'Līlā' (sportive) Vibhūtis (worlds).

'Tirumantra' comprises three words, namely, '*Aum*' (Praṇava) '*Namaḥ*' and 'Nārāyaṇāya'. Of the three letters, comprised in the first word, the first letter 'A' denotes the Lord Himself, the originator of the whole universe and the protector of all. 'A' is the very first of all letters and could thus symbolise the origin of the Universe, namely, the Lord and this is clearly brought out in this song. Derived, as it is, from the root 'Ava rakṣaṇe', 'A' means Protector and here again, it could appropriately denote the Lord, Who is the Protector of all. But then, when the Lord extends protection, the immediate presence of Mahālakṣmi, the Lord's Divine Consort, is absolutely necessary and, in this context, her association with the letter 'A' as a protecting force, is to be thought of. Although the Lord is surely capable of protecting His subjects, all by Himself, yet the Sāstras say that He bestows such benevolent protection in the company of His consort, Mahālakṣmi Who is grace personified. "Lakṣmyā saha Hṛṣikeśo Devyā Kāruṇyarūpayā, rakṣakas sarva sidhānte Vedāntepi ca gīyate" etc. This is just to eliminate the possible risk of the Supreme Lord being alienated from His subjects, on account of the innumerable lapses of the latter. Therefore, the letter 'A' has to denote Lord Nārāyaṇa, in close conjunction with Mahālakṣmi. That is why this conjunction is referred to, in this song.

The twin aspects of protection, extended by the Lord to His Subjects, are removal of all undesirable things and fulfilment

of aspirations, as applied to individuals. The slaying of the formidable elephant, Kuvalayāpīṭam, referred to in this song, indicates how the Lord removes the evils, the impediments.

tāṉē ulaku ellām, tāṉē paṭaittu, iṭantu,
tāṉē uṇṭu, umiḻntu, tāṉē āḷvāṉē. (X-5-3)

Translation

'Tis He (Nārāyaṇa), Who does the whole universe pervade,
Who did create it all with no external aid,
Who did in His stomach sustain all the worlds
And then spat them out; 'tis He who did once again
Lift the Earth from deep waters, everything He does ordain.

Note

The meaning of the word, 'Nārāyaṇa', is expounded further, particularly, the role of the Lord, as the Protector of one and all. The entire universe constitues His very body and as such, He is bound to sustain His body. He is the sole Architect of the Universe, combining in Himself the triple causes of creation, the *Material*, the *Operative* and the *Instrumental* causes. Creation of the Universe, dowering myriads of souls with the appropriate bodies, the vehicles of expression or the media of evolution, is by itself the Lord's act of grace galore. On the top of that, He sustains all the worlds, with their massive contents of things and beings, inside His stomach during the deluge and thus saves them all from being swept off and dismembered by the whirling waters of terrific depth and width. And then, He spits them back into their erstwhile positions, quite *in tact*. The several facets of the Lord's universal protection are thus indicated.

āḷvāṉ,āḻi nīrk kōḷvāy aravu-aṇaiyāṉ
tāḷvāy malar iṭṭu, nāḷvāy nāṭīrē. (X-5-4)

Translation

Reclining on the serpent, strong and smart,
The Lord holds sway over the Universe vast;

Notes

The Āḻvār is now elaborating the meaning of the word 'Nārāyaṇa', used in a shortened form as 'Nāraṇan', in the preceding song. Mother Earth (Bhū Devī) is one of the three principal Consorts of Lord Nārāyaṇa and reference to Bhū Devī, in this song can be taken to include the two other Consorts as well, 'Śrī' and 'Nīḷā' Devis, in the Celestial setting. "Our Sire" would denote the 'Lord's sovereignty over the 'Līlā Vibhūti', the Sportive Universe, in which we all live. That means, the Lord is depicted as the Sovereign Master of both the 'Nitya' (eternal) and 'Līlā' (sportive) Vibhūtis (worlds).

'Tirumantra' comprises three words, namely, '*Aum*' (Praṇava) '*Namaḥ*' and 'Nārāyaṇāya'. Of the three letters, comprised in the first word, the first letter 'A' denotes the Lord Himself, the originator of the whole universe and the protector of all. 'A' is the very first of all letters and could thus symbolise the origin of the Universe, namely, the Lord and this is clearly brought out in this song. Derived, as it is, from the root 'Ava rakṣaṇe', 'A' means Protector and here again, it could appropriately denote the Lord, Who is the Protector of all. But then, when the Lord extends protection, the immediate presence of Mahālakṣmi, the Lord's Divine Consort, is absolutely necessary and, in this context, her association with the letter 'A' as a protecting force, is to be thought of. Although the Lord is surely capable of protecting His subjects, all by Himself, yet the Sāstras say that He bestows such benevolent protection in the company of His consort, Mahālakṣmi Who is grace personified. "Lakṣmyā saha Hṛṣikeśo Devyā Kāruṇyarūpayā, rakṣakas sarva sidhānte Vedāntepi ca gīyate" etc. This is just to eliminate the possible risk of the Supreme Lord being alienated from His subjects, on account of the innumerable lapses of the latter. Therefore, the letter 'A' has to denote Lord Nārāyaṇa, in close conjunction with Mahālakṣmī. That is why this conjunction is referred to, in this song.

The twin aspects of protection, extended by the Lord to His Subjects, are removal of all undesirable things and fulfilment of aspirations, as applied to individuals. The slaying of the formidable elephant, Kuvalayāpīṭam, referred to in this song, indicates how the Lord removes the evils, the impediments.

tāṉē ulaku ellām, tāṉē paṭaittu, iṭantu,
tāṉē uṇṭu, umiḻntu, tāṉē āḷvāṉē. (X-5-3)

Translation

'Tis He (Nārāyaṇa), Who does the whole universe pervade,
Who did create it all with no external aid,
Who did in His stomach sustain all the worlds
And then spat them out; 'tis He who did once again
Lift the Earth from deep waters, everything He does ordain.

Note

The meaning of the word, 'Nārāyaṇa', is expounded further, particularly, the role of the Lord, as the Protector of one and all. The entire universe constitues His very body and as such, He is bound to sustain His body. He is the sole Architect of the Universe, combining in Himself the triple causes of creation, the *Material*, the *Operative* and the *Instrumental* causes. Creation of the Universe, dowering myriads of souls with the appropriate bodies, the vehicles of expression or the media of evolution, is by itself the Lord's act of grace galore. On the top of that, He sustains all the worlds, with their massive contents of things and beings, inside His stomach during the deluge and thus saves them all from being swept off and dismembered by the whirling waters of terrific depth and width. And then, He spits them back into their erstwhile positions, quite *in tact*. The several facets of the Lord's universal protection are thus indicated.

āḷvāṉ,āḻi nīrk kōḷvāy aravu-aṇaiyāṉ
tāḷvāy malar iṭṭu, nāḷvāy nāṭīrē. (X-5-4)

Translation

Reclining on the serpent, strong and smart,
The Lord holds sway over the Universe vast;

Him may You adore, all the time,
Placing at His lovely feet flowers fine.

Notes

'Āya', the dative ending of the last word of Tirumantra, that is, 'Nārāyaṇāya' reveals the deep urge of the subject to render service unto the Lord in every conceivable manner, like that of 'Ādiśesa' (first servant), rather the factotum who serves the Lord in a number of ways, as umbrella, throne, footwear, bed etc., etc. Therefore it is, that the Āḷvār calls upon the worldlings to render service unto the Lord, in keeping with the above elucidation of the meaning of the word 'Nārāyaṇāya'.

The Lord reclines on Ādiśeṣa, in the Milk ocean, the seat of His creative activity, well within the ear-shot of the appeal of ardent devotees, so as to fulfil His role, as the Universal Protector. He is also easily worshippable, with whatever flowers the votary can get hold of.

nāṭīr, nāḷtōṟum vāṭā malarkoṇṭu;
pāṭir, avaṉ nāmam; vīḷē peṟalāmē. (X-5-5)

Translation

Attain you shall emancipation
If you worship the Lord daily
With fresh flowers and sing gaily
His holy names, set to nice tunes.

Note

When one renders service unto the Lord, in keeping with one's essential nature, as the exclusive vassal of the Lord, solely dependent on Him, one is sure to attain Heaven, the final emancipation from the terrific cycle of birth and death and eternal service unto the Lord in Heaven, in close proximity. The worship of the Lord has to go on, all the time, even as one satiates one's hunger by taking food with regular frequency. It is not mere spelling out the Lord's names that the Āḷvār speaks of here but singing the names tunefully.

mēyāṉ vēṅkaṭam–kāyāmalar vaṇṇaṉ,
pēyār mulai uṇṭa vāyāṉ, mātavaṉē. (X-5-6)

Translation

Mātavaṉ, of the lovely complexion of lily flower,
Who did the devil's (Pūthanā's) breasts gather
And suck them out to death, is the one
Who in (Mount) Vēṅkaṭam stays on.

Note

In the preceding song, the Āḷvār had asked the men around, to seek out the Supreme Lord and worship Him daily with flowers and sing His glorious names. And now, he tells them that the Lord is not that cold, icy abstract thing, formless and invisible, as some would say, but is easily accessible, atop Mount Tiruvēṅkaṭam, exhibiting His resplendent Form of exquisite charm. As already elucidated by the Āḷvār in X-4-4, the Lord takes up position in pilgrim centres like Mount Tiruvēṅkaṭam, only to step on to the heart-region of His devotees. The Lord enthrals the votaries through His (worshippable) Iconic Form of extraordinary charm. As Nampiḷḷai puts it, *even a tiny twig will come under the magic spell of this charm and cannot resist the urge to serve Him*, an urge, deep and irresistible and a mere twig though, it just cannot exist without serving Him. What is even more attractive is the wholesome conjunction of the Lord with the Divine Mother, as Mādhava, bearing Māhalakṣmi on His winsome chest, a highly profitable combination from the point of view of emancipation of the errant supplicants, with countless transgressions.

mātavaṉ eṉṟu eṉṟu, ōta vallīrēl,
tītu oṉṟum aṭaiyā-ētam cārāvē. (X-5-7)

Translation

Past sins shall not affect you at all
Nor shall sins taint you, in future, as well,
If that name, 'Mātavaṉ' you'd but spell

Notes

(i) Remarkable indeed is the magnitude of the Āḷvār's compassion for the fellow-beings. Here is the Āḷvār's recipe for those who are unable to seek out the Lord, in His worshippable image Form, and worship Him daily with choice flowers either at Tiruvēṅkaṭam or any other pilgrim centre. It will suffice if they chant 'Dvaya', the gem of a mantra, a couplet, the first part of which enjoins that the individual soul should seek refuge at the lotus feet of the Lord through the mediation of Mahālakṣmi while the second stipulates that service unto them both, in a state of conjunction, should be prayed for. Again, spelling the name, 'Mādhava', denoting this holy combination, need not be of one's own longing to pronounce it; it would be enough if some one chanted it and these people merely followed suit.

(ii) The holy name (Tirumantra) will, by itself, confer on its chanters salvation, and 'Dvaya', the gem of a mantra, would likewise procure salvation for those who utter it. Well, in that name, 'Mādhava', there is a combination of both 'Tirumantra' and 'Dvaya', with redoubled efficicacy, keeping the votaries above all sins, past, present and future.

cārā ētaṅkaḷ-nīr ār mukil vaṇṇaṉ
pēr ār ōtuvār ārār-amararē. (X–5–8)

Translation

Those that chant the holy names of the cloud-hued Lord,
Whatever might be their descent and deeds,
Shall well be beyond the reach of evil
And be on a par with the redoubted Celestials.

Note

That there is no restriction whatsoever, conditioning one's eligibility to chant the Lord's names, is clearly brought out, in this song. Whosoever chants the holy names of the Lord, of enchanting complexion, shall not only be beyond the reach of evil of any kind but shall also be on a par with the exalted Celestials. The mere sight of the cloud-hued Lord is so exhilarating that it cannot but tempt the beholders to utter His holy names, over and over again. Irrespective of their parentage and occupation, those that recite the Lord's glorious names acquire a stature equal to that of the Celestials who subsist solely on divine service.

amararkku ariyāṉai, tamarkaṭku eḷiyāṉai,
amarat toḻuvārkaṭku amarā viṉaikaḷē (X–5–9)

Translation

They that are in God-love soaked and adore
The Lord Supreme, beyond the reach of even Brahmā and others,
But unto the devout easily accessible,
Are indeed out of reach of ills and evils.

Note

The Lord is, no doubt, the Great Giver, rather the one and only Giver and there is no gift beyond Him. He is known as 'Arthidhārtha paridhāna dhikṣitha'. The 'Ithihāsas' and Purāṇas contain frequent references to the Lord's benevolence unto the Devas vis-a-vis the Asuras, on whom the Lord inflicts sufferings. The Āḷvār has also alluded to this fact, quite often, in this hymnal itself. And yet, the Lord makes Himself scarce, that is, He does not reveal His glory and grandeur to the Devas, their exaltation notwithstanding, because they are only self-seekers, always wanting the Lord to cater to their selfish ends. Even Brahmā, who emerged from the lotus flower which sprouted from the Lord's navel, couldn't cash in that unique position of advantage and perceive the Lord's prowess, His greatness and grandeur, to any appreciable extent. On the other hand, the Lord is easily accessible to the devout, whose love unto Him is one of purity and virginity, with no strings attached. Love rendered to God for God's sake, culminating in benediction or glorification of God, carries with it the highest reward, namely, the possession of God Himself. This fact is brought home, in this song.

viṉai val iruḷ eṉṉum, muṉaikaḷ veruvip pōm—
cuṉai nal malar iṭṭu, niṉaimiṉ neṭiyāṉē. (X–5–10)

Translation

Sins in their multitude and nescience dense,
Shall, in sheer fright, clear out,
When you on the Lord Supreme meditate
And worship Him with nice flowers, fresh from ponds.

Notes

(i) While the first song of this decad is in elucidation of 'Tirumantra' and the seventh deals with 'Dvaya', the 'Mantra Ratna' the later songs of this decad have a bearing on '*CARAMA ŚLOKA*' (Bhagavad Gita XVIII-66), wherein Lord Kṛṣṇa assured Arjuna of release from all sins (Sarva pāpebhyo mokṣayiṣyāmi).

(ii) The Āḻvār calls upon people to worship the Lord with flowers, easily procured from ponds, and even if this slight effort is not possible, they will do well to just meditate on the Lord Who keeps thinking of His subjects all the time and leads them on to exalted positions (Ahaṁ smarāmi Madbhaktaṁ nayāmi paramāṁ gathiṃ).

neṭiyāṉ aruḷ cūṭum paṭiyāṉ caṭakōpaṉ
noṭi āyirattu ip pattu aṭiyārkku aruḷpēṟē. (X–5–11)

Translation

These songs ten, out of the thousand of Caṭakōpaṉ,
Who basks in the grand sun-shine
Of the grace galore of the Lord Supreme,
Will put the chanters on a par with him.

Notes

(i) The Āḻvār ends up this decad by stating that the chanters of these ten songs will be blest, like him, with the Lord's spontaneous grace, in super-abundance.

(ii) Rāmāyaṇa, the great Ithihāsa, took birth in the grace of the four-headed Brahmā who is anything but steady, while 'Viṣṇu Purāṇa', the 'Purāṇa-Rātṇa', is the outcome of the benedictive grace of 'Pulasthya', one of the four disciples of Śivā of tāmasik temperament and habits. On the other hand, Tiruvāymoḻi flowed from the loving grace of Lord Mahā Viṣṇu, the Puruṣottama of unalloyed purity. Herein lies the overwhelming superiority of Tiruvāymoḻi over Rāmāyaṇa, the epic of top-ranking excellence and Viṣṇupurāṇa which occupies the pride of place among the Purāṇas.

(iii) The Āḻvār could himself declare that he was the recipient of the Lord's grace galore, because he was quite conscious of its great impact on him.

Tenth Centum—Sixth Decad (X-6)
(Aruḷpeṟuvār)

Preamble

As the great Nampiḷḷai would put it, in his inimitable diction, the stage has now been reached when the Lord is in hot pursuit of the Āḻvār. The position hitherto, commencing from the opening song of the Āḻvār's first hymnal (Tiruviruttam) was, however, just the reverse, that is, the Āḻvār was seeking out the Lord and pursuing Him doggedly. The Āḻvār, who was the supplicant before, is now vigorously sought after by the Lord Whose love for the great savant knows no bounds, vide the 3rd song of this decad, which highlights the speed with which the Lord wishes to take the Āḻvār, to the heavenly abode. In the exuberance of His love for the Āḻvār, the Lord would even think in terms of lifting him bodily to heaven. The Āḻvār had to plead with the Lord to give up His overambitious project and he advised Him not to defile the sanctity of Heaven by introducing therein his physical body. What is even more astounding is the Lord's extreme fascination for the Āḻvār's physical body, the last of the staggering number of bodies, tenanted by him, that led Him on to seek the Āḻvār's permission to enjoy his body, limb by limb. For this purpose, the Lord would assume a number of Forms, as He did

during the famous '*RĀSAKRĪDA*' dance with the damsels of Vrindāvan and again, when He married sixteen thousand pretty ladies and led the life of a typical householder with each one of them, all at once, in the holy island of Dvāraka, a township raised by Lord Kṛṣṇa Himself from the bed of the Sea.

If we probed a little into the relative stance of the Āḻvār and the Lord, it can easily be discovered that the Āḻvār's yearning for the Lord dwindles down to insignificant proportions, as compared to the all-conquering love, which the Lord bears for him. Actually, this has already been succinctly brought out in IX-6-10. Well, if the Lord bore such inordinate love for the Āḻvār, defying description, and still kept him on in this abode, it was only in the larger interests of mankind, as a whole, their uplift through the Āḻvār's scintillating, soul-stirring songs. Now that this purpose has been achieved, the Lord can no longer resist the deep urge in Him to expedite the Āḻvār's uplift to Heaven. As a matter of fact, the Lord is already well on the move, having come to nearby Tiruvāṭṭāṟu, the vantage point for lifting the Āḻvār to Heaven. Of course, the Lord could as well confer on the Āḻvār, heavenly bliss, right here, but, in the very nature of things, this land of dark nescience is not the place for the Lord's uninterrupted enjoyment of the Āḻvār. Even so, He would want the Āḻvār to command Him to take him to Heaven. In other words, He wishes to confer on him heavenly bliss and beatitude, in a spirit of service unto the Āḻvār and not as a matter of grace. The Āḻvār is, however, not the one who would make any gesture of the kind which militates against his creed of complete self-abnegation, resulting from his total dependence on the Lord Whose will is paramount. Put in a nutshell, the position is like this :

Lord to Āḻvār: "Oh, Āḻvār, won't you beckon Me to take you on to the heavenly abode?"

The Āḻvār ponders within himself: "How amazing and how incredible that the Sovereign Lord seeks my permission and wants to play a subordinate role! Shall I not meet my fellow-men and talk to them about this and make them also appreciate and admire the Lord's simplicity galore and tender solicitude? But then, these fellows are hardly available to me for sharing my wonderful experience, immersed, as they are, in wordly pleasures. And how about the Lord? Shall I not pour out my mind to the Lord Himself, expatiating on this wonderful gesture of His? Alas! He too is heavily pre-occupied, fiercely concentrating on how best He can expedite my ascent to heaven. Let me, in the last resort, open up a dialogue with my own God-bent mind and impress upon it the amazing simplicity of the Supreme Lord, the immensity of the love borne by Him unto me and the resultant benefits accrued to me".

In short, the Āḻvār had hitherto looked upon the Lord, as the sole ordainer, of unbridled independence, but now he realises that the Lord is but the abject servant of His devotees and gives vent to his hearty appreciation of the Lord's tender solicitude and amazing simplicity.

aruḷpeṟuvār aṭiyār-tam aṭiyaṉēṟku āḻiyāṉ
aruḷtaruvāṉ amaikiṉṟāṉ; atu namatu vitivakaiyē;
iruḷ taru mā ñālattuḷ iṉip piṟavi yāṉ vēṇṭēṉ;
maruḷ oḻi nī, maṭa neñcē! vāṭṭāṟṟāṉ aṭi vaṇaṅkē. (X-6-1)

Translation

The Lord, Who does the discus wield, graciously insists
On salving me, the vassal of His devotees, who on His grace subsist;
He would want me to order Him about! I shan't desire
Birth in this land of dark nescience any more,
The feet of the Lord at Tiruvāṭṭāṟu, do adore
And yield not, Oh, fickle mind, to the thought, that allures,
Of enjoying the Supreme Lord, right from here.

Note

(i) The Āḻvār cajoles his mind to revel, along with him, in the enjoyment of the Lord's glorious trait of loving condescension, in the following terms :

"Don't you see that the Lord is all agog to confer on me the supreme bliss, and that too, at my dictation? Oh, what a trait and how glorious! There is none over here with whom I can share my jubilation over this wonderful trait of the Lord. Would you, therefore,

come along with me to the Eternal Land (Heaven) where we can appropriately share this exulation with the exalted and enlightened denizens over there? The Lord wants to get hold of me as firmly as He wields the lovely discus. In other words, He shall give me up only if He gave up the valiant discus. Actually, He sheds on me the aggregate of the love He bears unto the discus and other exalted members of that holy band, known as Eternal Heroes (Nitya Sūris). Well, do you know how this has come about? Surely, I could not have been chosen as the recipient of His super-abundant love and overwhelming grace, had I invoked His grace directly instead of being the humble vassal that I am of the one that stands last in the chain of His devotees".

The last sentence of the above monologue obviously reflects the theme already set out by the Āḷvār in VIII-10 and here then is the point of time at which that bears fruit. The Āḷvār's mind was, however, quick to retort, saying " Well, You were, all the time, keenly awaiting the influx of the Lord's grace and now that it is forthcoming, You are the blessed recipient thereof, all right. What then is the special feature, you are trying to import into it now?"

And now is the turn of the Āḷvār to make the brilliant exposition, as follows :

No doubt, God Himself is eager to grant salvation to the subjects, unsolicited, as becomes His high office (Godship) and yet, He chooses to see the soul spontaneously fly to Him for embracement. This is like the bridegroom, throbbing with love for his bride, waiting, all the same, till the bride herself did make the first movement and fly to him, the pleasure thus getting enhanced on both sides. This is precisely the meaning of God waiting and the soul moving towards Him. Mysterious indeed is the way of God in the exercise of His grace, and He suffers the creatures' complacence in believing that they deserved the Lord's grace by their own acts of merit. Lakṣmaṇa, who was all agog to render

service unto Rāma and Sītā in every conceivable manner and followed them into exile, indicated to Rāma, just before the commencement of the exile, the inordinate longing on his (Lakṣmaṇa's) part to serve the Divine Couple, in a concrete manner. He addressed Rāma thus:

" You shall with Your Videhan Spouse
Recline upon the mountain's brows ;
Be mine the toil, be mine to keep
Watch over You both, awake or asleep ".

When the three of them actually reached the forest, Lakṣmaṇa recollected that he was but Rāma's vassal and had to do his bidding; Lakṣmaṇa, therefore, petitioned to Rāma to grant the necessary permission before he (Lakṣmaṇa) would stir into action. Even then, Rāma tried to keep Himself in the background and said:

" Let a spot be chosen, pleasant and pure
Where waters gleam and trees are fair ".

This did not, however, satisfy Lakṣmaṇa, despite his pledge to render every kind of service (ahaṁ sarvaṁ Kariṣyāmi) and he prayed unto Rama, ' Kriyatāmiti mām vadha ':

" Select yourself some pleasant spot,
Be mine the care to rear the cot ".

And now, the Āḷvār tells his mind, " How amazing is this indeed! the Lord addresses me in such terms as Lakṣmaṇa did unto Rāma and wants me to command Him and take service from Him. He wants me to order Him to take me to Heaven and indicate the elaborate arrangements to be made by Him *en route*, such as setting up banners, buntings and festoons, holding over my head the parasol, to the accompaniment of music from pipes and drums, the Lord Himself leading the way, with torch in hand, proclaiming that I, His Lord, was coming behind, heralded by the holy band of chanters of Divya Prabandha and so on ".

How the Lord hesitated to exercise His own will in the matter of taking the Āḻvār to Heaven without a specific directive from him, is succinctly brought out in Īṭu commentary which, for its sheer brilliance, deserves to be reproduced here, *in toto*. Nampiḷḷai puts it that his Master, Nañcīyar directly heard his Guru, Parāśara Bhaṭṭar, elucidate the point at issue, by expatiating on Śloka 42 of Aḷavandār's 'Stotra Ratna' (hymnal gems) (Tathānujānantamudhāra vīkṣaṇaiḥ), as follows:

Senāpathi is the Archangel and premier chamberlain to God. Dressed in his stately robes, he carries the fan (the sign and privilege of royalty) and holds the baton (symbol of authority). Vast indeed is the privilege he enjoys at the hands of the Lord; unbid, he can enter the private chambers where the Lord and His Divine Consorts are in the gay abandon of their love. The Lord would not take offence at His hoary Chamberlain's sudden entry into His private chambers. On the other hand, He would even feel more delighted in bis company, relegating His sport with the Divine Consorts to a secondary place. Far from being embarrassed by the sudden entry of the Minister, without prior notice or summons, the Divine Consorts just suspend their free disport and are all attention from the throne which they share with the Lord. The Minister, who is by-no-means unaware of the delicate situation, tarries not longer than absolutely needed for the transaction of the State business and puts before the Lord, in as few and select terms as possible, proposals relating to the Cosmic administration, such as the transfers and appointments of Brahmās (the Demi-urges in charge of each Cosmic egg, comprising fourteen worlds) etc. The Lord at once signifies His approval of all such proposals unquestioningly, literally signing the sanctions with sweet looks. He would say, "Sire, as you have proposed, so be it".

As Bhaṭṭārya was expounding the profound secrets of God's love unto His trusted lieutenants, as embodied

in the śloka in question, he fell into praroxysms of joy, in the company of Kiṭāmpi-Āccāṉ (the body-guard disciple of Śrī Rāmānujācārya) and others who were present in that assembly. Āccāṉ was Bhaṭṭārya's co-student and so great indeed was their mutual affection that Iḷaiyāḻvāṉ, a disciple of Āccāṉ queried the Master as to how he happened to love and follow Bhaṭṭārya, much more than Bhaṭṭārya's own disciples did. Āccāṉ replied :

"Son, you don't seem to be aware of what took place, the other day; placing a book in Bhaṭṭārya's hands, Śrī Rāmānuja led him before Lord Raṅganātha and there, outside the Holy Bar, made him recite a Śloka; looking round, Śrī Rāmānuja called upon all his disciples, assembled there, to hold Bhaṭṭārya on a par with himself, and bestow on him love and regard in an equal measure."

(ii) "*I shan't desire birth in this land of darkness and nescience any more*". Thus does the Āḻvār clarify his present stand to his mind which questioned him whether, in the light of the Lord's subservient mood, he would go his own way and enjoy the Lord, right here, or yield to His wish and permit Him to lift him up to the heavenly abode. As a matter of fact, the Āḻvār's mind was quite aware of the earlier attitude of the Āḻvār and his special fascination for the several pilgrim centres in this abode, where the Lord is manifest in His worshippable iconic Form, displaying, at each such centre, a particular aspect and special attribute to be meditated upon. The Āḻvār now impresses upon his mind that, while his love for these centres remains unabated, he nevertheless dreaded this soil, because of its corrupting influence on even that exalted band of Eternal Heroes (Nitya Sūris), if ever they came down here. Nay, the Earth's contamination would extend even to their Chief. Well, did it spare even one of the eminence of Prahlāda? Further, although Nammāḻvār and the other Āḻvārs came into this world, at their own volition, for the redemption and uplift

of mankind, as set forth in the Śloka "Kritātiṣu narā Rājan.......... Kalau içcanthi sambhavam" of Śrī Bhāgavada, yet he would not wish to stay in this abode any more, having already rendered the service expected of him, namely, singing these hymns, thereby rendering 'Kali' (the evil forces of the current yuga) ineffective.

True, there was a time when the Āḻvār stuck fast to centres like Tiruvāraṉviḷai and would have voted for ever-lasting stay there, in preference to going up to Heaven. But now, he has been completely disillusioned and will no longer like to walk on the double-edged razor that life is, in this material body made up of the five elements and in this land of dark nescience, with its endless potentialities for mischief and incalculable damage to his spiritual progress. If that were so, addressing his mind currently to adore the Lord, enshrined at Tiruvāṭṭāṟu would appear to be rather misleading but it is not so. The Lord has come to this centre only to expedite the Āḻvār's ascent to Heaven and it, therefore, behoves the Āḻvār to co-operate with the Lord and facilitate His work. Adoration of the Lord, in this particular context, would, therefore, mean that the Āḻvār should fall in line with the Lord, whose presence in Tiruvāṭṭāṟu forms part of His project of lifting the Āḻvār up to the high Heavens.

vāṭṭāṟṟāṉ aṭi vaṇaṅki, mā ñalap piṟappu aṟuppāṉ-
kēṭṭāyē maṭa neñcē! –kēcavaṉ em perumāṉaip-
pāṭṭu āya pala pāṭi, paḷaviṉaikaḷ paṟṟu aṟuttu,
nāṭṭārōṭu iyalvu oḻintu, nāraṇaṉai naṇṇiṉamē. (X–6–2)

Translation

Many indeed are the favours on us conferred;
Better take note, my docile mind, our contacts were severed
With the world around and gone are our age-long sins,
To cut our moorings with this land of dark nescience,
Thro' many a song we did laud Kēcavaṉ, our Lord,

The lovely feet of our Sire in Tiruvāṭṭāṟu, we adored
And Nāraṇaṉ, Our Liege-Lord, we have attained.

Note

This song is but a continuation of the Āḻvār's dialogue with his mind. Questioned by the mind as to why the Āḻvār gloated over the grace of the Lord, as if it was something extra-ordinary, instead of looking upon it merely as the Lord's response, rather belated, to the request made by him, right from the opening song of his very first hymnal, namely, Tiruviruttam, the Āḻvār disabuses it of its wrong notions. Well, the Āḻvār had merely prayed for deliverance from this foul body, purged of all his grossness, while what actually materialised, due to the influx of the Lord's extra-ordinary grace, is, as listed in this song, namely, eradication of his age-long sins, lauding the Lord through a spate of songs, comprised in his four hymnals, severance of contacts with the worldlings and attainment of Lord Śrīman Nārāyaṇa. The Āḻvār would want his mind to take due note of all these and acknowledge the immensity of the Lord's bounty. By exhibiting the enthralling charm of His locks of hair, the Lord attracted the Āḻvār and the latter poured out his heart unto Him through many a scintillating song. Was it not the Lord's unique grace which made the Āḻvār laud Him, instead of falling in line with his fellow-beings, in this land, rampant with rant and adulation, glorifying the frail humans, with all their dirt and devilry? The sycophants themselves are fully aware of the unworthiness of the men they adore and yet they indulge in such unpardonable white lies, all for the sake of petty gains and eking out their livelihood. And what more? To the list of favours conferred on the Āḻvār has also been added his complete severance from the men around, steeped miserably in the erroneous notions of 'I-ness' and 'My-ness'. And then, the finale comes, namely, the attainment of the Eternal Friend and Relation, the Supreme Lord-Śrīman Nārāyaṇa, to the rigid and total exclusion of those parasites, the artificial, earthly relations.

naṉṉiṉam nārāyaṇaṉai nāmaṅkaḷ pala colli;
maṉ-ulakil vaḷam mikka vāṭṭāṟṟāṉ vantu, iṉṟu
viṇ-ulakam taruvāṉāy viraikiṉṟāṉ, vitivakaiyē;
eṇṇiṉavāṟu ākā ik karumaṅkaḷ-eṉ neñcē! (X-6-3)

Translation

Nārāyaṇa, our Benefactor great, we have attained,
Chanting many a holy name of His, my friendly mind,
The benign qualities of my Lord beam forth in this land,
And stationed in Tiruvāṭṭāṟu, He awaits my command
To grant me the Heaven and that too, with great speed;
Well, these deeds of His do my expectations far exceed!

Notes

(i) The Āḻvār's joyous rapport with his mind continues. He is amazed at the Lord's overwhelming grace, far exceeding all his earlier expectations.

(ii) As the Āḻvār contemplated on the manifestations of the Lord, in His worshippable Form at the various pilgrim centres, he was particularly impressed by a special auspicious attribute, graciously displayed by the Lord in each centre and this was naturally meditated upon by Him. The illustrious author of 'Ācārya Hṛdayam' has indeed high-lighted this aspect. In aphorism 184 of the said work, it has been brought out that the Lord at Tiruvāṭṭāṟu has been presented to us by Nammāḻvār, as one who subserves His devotees, even while conferring on them the heavenly bliss. Oh, what a gift and in what manner served! As Nampiḷḷai puts it, in his soul-stirring diction, it is not as if the Lord just accommodates the Āḻvār, in that Eternal Land peopled by the Celestials, and puts him as one more denizen of the exalted Heaven; the Lord simply gifts away the entire Heaven to the Āḻvār. What is more, He deems it a matter of great condescension, on the part of the Āḻvār, if he accepted the gift. The Lord's anxiety, in this context, arises from the fact that He is in no mood to just lift the Āḻvār along but He would do so only at the Āḻvār's own bidding, indicating the manner in which he should be conducted by the Lord and assigning Him quite a few tasks to be performed *en route*.

Well, seeing that the creature is but the Creator's great gain, the latter's anxiety to reclaim the former, seeking his willing co-operation is quite understandable. Again, in the work-a-day world, when we seek the good offices of some one for the accomplishment of a particular task, we find that his actual performance falls far short of our expectations and so, we have to do our own bit also. But that is not the case with the Lord whose bounty surpasses even our dreamy expectations.

eṉ neñcattu uḷ iruntu, iṅku irum tamiḻ nūl ivai moḻintu,
val neñcattu iraṇiyaṉai mārvu iṭanta vāṭṭāṟṟāṉ,
maṉ añca, pāratattup pāṇṭavarkkāp paṭaitoṭṭāṉ;
nal neñcē! nam perumāṉ namakku aruḷ-tāṉ ceyvāṉē.
(X-6-4)

Translation

Note, Ye, my sweet mind, the Lord, in Tiruvāṭṭāṟu enshrined,
Tore into twain Iraṇyaṉ's heart of steel and, in the war
Of Mahābhārata, took up arms for Pāṇṭavas' sake, a terror
He was unto the kings ranged opposite; firmly fixed in my mind,
These fine songs were by Him sung and heaps He on me evermore
Favours fresh, indeed an act of grace galore!

Notes

(i) The great Ordainer that the Supreme Lord is, He has been depicted in songs one and three of this decad, as the ordained, carrying out the dictates of the Āḻvār or at least wanting to do so. The present song dispels the doubt, possibly entertained by some persons as to whether the Sovereign Lord would ever descend to such depths and play a subservient role. Did not the Lord keep Himself ready all over the place, as Narasiṅga, so as to respond immediately to the call of His young devotee, Prahlāda? And then, He

served the Pāṇṭavas in ever so many ways and did the meanest of jobs, such as running errands, driving Arjuna's chariot and so on.

(ii) The Āḷvār's mind, steeped, for ages, in sensual pleasures, was taken possession of, by the Lord, at the appropriate moment, and there He established Himself firmly lest He should be denied re-entry into the Āḷvār's mind, once He got out of it. Well, what was all this herculean effort for, on the part of the Lord? Here is the answer: It was from this vantage point that the Lord sang 'Tiruvāymoḷi', these songs, *par excellence*, chaste and elegant, syntactically perfect, setting the pace for future grammarians to emulate and enjoy. The authorship of 'Tiruvāymoḷi' is thus clearly ascribed to the Lord Himself.

(iii) Lord Kṛṣṇa controlled and conducted the military strategy of the great war of Mahābhāratha, at every turn. Once, it so happened that the horses of the Pāṇḍava army were almost dying of thirst and there was no water near at hand. The Lord, who could divine the presence of water even in rocky soil, drew forth plentiful supply of water from the bosom of the earth and retrieved what seemed to be a forlorn situation beyond remedy. Naturally, the Lord's presence on the battlefield, as a partisan of the Pāṇḍavas, ever ready to surmount difficulties of whatever magnitude, struck terror in the hearts of the kings ranged on the side of the kauravas, and they sank down, with diffidence.

vāṉ ēṟa vaḻi tanta vāṭṭāṟṟāṉ paṇivakaiyē
nāṉ ēṟap peṟukiṉṟēṉ-narakattai naku neñcē!–
tēṉ ēṟu malart tuḷavam tikaḻ pātaṉ , ceḷum paṟavai
tāṉ ēṟit tirivāṉa tāḷ-iṇai eṉ talaimēlē. (X–6–5)

Translation

I am on my heavenly ascent and the Lord enshrined
In Tiruvāṭṭaṟu is here to guide me *en route*, as of yore ordained,
Laugh down, my mind, the world that hitherto kept you bound;
Implanted on my head are the feet, well adorned
By the honey-studded tuḷaci flower, of the Lord,
Who roams about on His lovely mount, the Garuḍa.

Notes

(i) The Āḷvār is indeed very jubilant over the immediate prospect of his ascent to Heaven through that exalted and exhilarating route, known as 'Arcirādi mārga'. He sees in the Lord at Tiruvāṭṭāṟu, his keen escort, on his Heaven-bound journey. As a matter of fact, the Āḷvār has still not got off the ground and yet, so sanguine is he of his ascent to Heaven that he feels that he is already well on the way.

(ii) The Āḷvār points out to his mind that the Lord has placed His good offices at his disposal, during his ensuing journey through the stellar route, true to His assurance of yore, 'Mokṣayiṣyāmi Māśucaḥ' (Bhagavad Gita XVIII-66). The mind wishes to know what precisely the Āḷvār expects of it, at this crucial juncture and the Āḷvār wants it to scornfully laugh at the hellish existence he had hitherto eked out, wallowing in the stye of worldly life, miserably bound down to home and hearth. The original text of this song specifically says that the Āḷvār called upon his mind to laugh at 'hell' but it need not be literally taken so, as life over here, entailing the ungodly pursuit, the scramble for food and raiment, is just as bad as hell. It is a disdainful laughter of dissociation from 'Samsāra', which had kept the Āḷvār in its unrelenting grip, for ages. Piḷḷai Aḻakiya Maṇavāḷa Perumāḷ Araiyar, who was confined to sick-bed for quite some length of time, received one day the temple honours, the garland worn by Lord Raṅganātha and the head-gear, sent to his residence, signifying the Lord's benedictive send-off of the ailing devotee to Heaven. Thereupon, the savant recited this song and called upon his mind to laugh down his malady.

But then, it might be asked whether the Āḷvār should not have done all this jeering at 'Samsāra', his erstwhile

comrade of ages, from the yonder side of Heaven, instead of doing it, while he is still in this land. Well, the Āḻvār has not the slightest doubt about his impending ascent to Heaven and actually, he has before him the glorious vision of the Lord sporting the honey-studded tuḷaci garlands, mounted on Garuḍa. The Āḻvār is indeed amazed at that he bears on his head the feet of the Lord, although He is mounted aloft, on Garuḍa's hefty back.

talaimēla tāḷ-iṇaikaḷ; tāmaraikkaṇ eṉ ammāṉ
nilaipērāṉ eṉ neñcattu, eppoḻutum; em perumāṉ,
malai māṭattu aravu-aṇaimēl vāṭṭāṟṟaṉ, matam mikka
kolai yāṉai maruppu ocittāṉ, kurai kaḻalkaḷ kuṟukiṉamē.
(X–6–6)

Translation

The lovely pair of feet of my lotus-eyed Sire,
I wear on my head, stays He in my heart for ever,
My Lord, Who unto me His glory did reveal,
Reclines on serpent-couch amid castles tall,
In Tiruvāṭṭāṟu; the valorous feet we did attain
Of the Lord by Whom the monstrous elephant was slain.

Notes

(i) Once again, the Āḻvār enumerates the favours heaped on him by the benign Lord. Having set His lovely pair of feet on the Āḻvār's head, the Lord casts on him glances, cool and sweet, from His lotus eyes. And then, He stands firmly in the Āḻvār's heart, rivetted, as it were. Questioned by his disciples, as to how the Lord could simultaneously stand on the Āḻvār's head, cast His sweet glances on him and stay inside his heart, Nampiḷḷai cited the example of Sage Saubhari who assumed fifty different forms to enjoy conjugal bliss with his fifty wives. The Lord should have likewise assumed a number of forms to enjoy the Āḻvār in different ways, all at once.

(ii) Describing the Lord at Tiruvāṭṭāṟu, as reclining on the serpent couch, the Āḻvār would appear to picture in his mind the stepping on to the Lord's lap, right on His serpent couch in the yonder heaven, by the 'Muktā' (Released Soul), as the Upaniṣads make out.

(iii) The slaying of Kuvalayāpīṭam, the formidable elephant in must set upon Lord Kṛṣṇa by the tyrannical Kamsa, by the Lord pulling out its tusks, signifies the riddance by the Lord of all ills and evils, the impediments in the way of the Āḻvār attaining Him.

kurai kaḻalkaḷ kuṟukiṉam; nam kōvintaṉ kuṭikoṇṭāṉ;
tirai kuḻuvu kaṭal puṭai cūḻ teṉ nāṭṭut tilatam aṉṉa
varai kuḻuvu maṇi māṭa vāṭṭāṟṟāṉ malaṟ aṭimēl,
virai kuḻuvu naṟum tuḻavam meynniṉṟu kamaḻumē (X–6–7)

Translation

The valorous feet I did attain of Kovintaṉ Who has His abode
In me, the sweet aroma does thus my body exude
Of the tuḷaci, with fragrance intense, at the lotus feet of the Lord
In Tiruvāṭṭāṟu, the crest jewel of the South, with Castles tall,
Surrounded by the Sea whose waves in numbers swell.

Note

In the preceding song, the Āḻvār said that he had attained the Lord's valorous feet and now he repeats it authoritatively, adducing the evidence to prove his statement. The Āḻvār's body smells sweet, exuding the fragrance of tuḷaci and this would be possible only if he came in close contact with the Lord at whose lotus feet there is the tuḷaci, with its profusion of perfume c.f. VIII-9-10, where the Parāṅkuśa Nāyakī's (Āḻvār transformed figuratively into a female lover) mate conclusively proves to the elders around, the union of the Nāyakī with the Lord, enshrined in Kuṭṭanāṭṭu Tiruppuliyūr, from the fragrance of tuḷaci emanating from her body.

meynniṉṟu kamaḻ tuḷava virai ēṟu tirumuṭiyaṉ,
kainniṉṟa cakkarattaṉ karutum iṭam porutu, puṉal
mainniṟa varai pōlum tiru uruva vāṭṭāṟṟāṟku
en naṉṟi ceytēṉā-eṉ neñcil tikaḻvatuvē? (X–6–8)

Translation

Oh, what is the merit in me, that in my heart beams the Lord
Who stays in Tiruvāṭṭāṟu, like unto a mountain of emerald,
Wearing on His crown, tuḷaci, full of fragrance that ever lasts
On my person, Who the warring discus wields that darts
At the target the Lord intends and gets back as victor smart?

Notes

(i) There was hardly any merit in him as far as the Āḷvār could scan and yet the Lord has chosen to shower on him a plethora of benefits. No wonder then, the Āḷvār is amazed at the overwhelming grace of the Lord, bestowed on him with sweet spontaniety.

(ii) The text, in this song, describing the pervasive fragrance of the tuḷaci garland worn by the Lord, lends itself to more than one interpretation. It could mean that the sweet fragrance of the tuḷaci, worn on the Lord's crown, permeates the entire body of the Āḷvār by virtue of the Lord's entry into his heart. It could also mean that the aroma of the tuḷaci migrated upwards from the Lord's body and stuck to His crown.

It is indeed interesting that the Lord's discus performs its job with push-button precision; when the thought of punishing an adversary just crosses the Lord's mind, it is as good as pressing the button, signalling to the discus the target in question. The discus darts with lightning speed, hits the target, all right and gets back to the Lord.

(iii) Unable to discover any good in him even by extra-liberal standards, not even anything bearing the semblance thereof, the Āḷvār is aghast with wonder at the Lord's great gesture.

tikaḻkiṉṟa tirumārpil tirumaṅkai-taṉṉōṭum
tikaḻkiṉṟa tirumālār cērviṭam taṉ vāṭṭāṟu;
pukaḻniṉṟa puḷ ūrti, pōr arakkar kulam keṭuttāṉ,
ikaḻvu iṉṟi, eṉ neñcattu, eppoḻutum piriyāṉē. (X-6-9)

Translation

How is it, Tirumāl on Whose resplendent chest does Tirumaṅkai beam,
Who dwells in cool Tiruvāṭṭāṟu, Who plies the bird of standing fame,
As His vehicle, Who the militant Asuras did blast,
Stays for ever in my despicable heart, with no disgust?

Notes

(i) Surely, it is the farthest limit up to which the Lord's love for His devotees could go; the Lord has chosen to stay firmly and, for ever, in the Āḷvār's despicable heart, without the slightest disgust or uneasiness.

(ii) The Lord, Who has got lodged on His winsome chest Lakṣmī, the Goddess of affluence, stays in cool Tiruvāṭṭāṟu, with Garuḍa, famed as the very embodiment of Vedas, as His favourite mount. And yet, one of such peerless eminence has chosen to stay, firm and fast, in the Āḷvār's heart, as if He has nowhere else to go, rather, does not like to go anywhere else. What is at the bottom of this massive love of the Lord? Well, this is what is exercising the Āḷvār's mind at the moment.

piriyātu āṭcey eṉṟu, piṟappu aṟuttu, āḷ aṟak koṇṭāṉ;
ari āki, iraṇiyaṉai ākam kīṇṭāṉ, aṉṟu;
periyārkku āṭpaṭṭakkāl, peṟāta payaṉ peṟumāṟu,
vari vāḷ vāy aravu-aṇaimēl vāṭṭāṟṟāṉ kāṭṭiṉaṉē. (X-6-10)

Translation

Blest am I with unremitting service unto the Lord,
Cut out from worldly bondage; my Sire who tore to shreds
Iraṇiyaṉ's body as Ari of yore and does on serpent-bed
Now relax at Tiruvāṭṭāṟu, has indeed demonstrated
That by His sweet grace do accrue unattainable gains
Unto those that remain as vassals of the great ones.

Notes

(i) The Āḷvār's great gains, far exceeding even the dreamiest of his expectations are: The Lord's own utterance from

His coral lips, inviting the Āḻvār to render unto Him unremitting service in close proximity and actually taking service from him; He has also halted the dreadful cycle of birth and death. Gains of this magnitude cannot be secured by one's own efforts, however long and strenuous and only the Lord's spontaneous grace, totally unrelated to one's merit, can shower such immense benefits which the text of the song, as in the original, terms as the *attainment of unattainable gains*. And now, the Āḻvār even goes to the length of bringing within the purview of this special category of gains, each one of the Lord's past incarnations, as Ari [Naraśiṅga (Man-Lion) etc.] as if they were all directed towards salving the Āḻvar and catering to his exclusive enjoyment.

(ii) It has been clearly elucidated in the episode of Kṣatrabandhu, occurring in 'Viṣṇudharma', how those blest by the 'Mahātmās', the great ones, are doled out rich benefits of rare magnitude. These mighty donors are not weighed down by considerations of either the pettiness of their recipients or the greatness of the benefits granted to them. In other words, these great souls do not shrink back and withhold their bounty, looking at the rich, intrinsic value of their gifts vis-a-vis the poor stature of the donees. As a matter of fact, even Prahlāda did not enjoy the proud privilege, conferred by the Lord on the Āḻvār, of singing 'Tiruvāymoḻi'. Little wonder then, the Āḻvār deems it an unattainable gain attained by him, a rare piece of service, graciously assigned to him by the Lord.

kāṭṭit taṉ kaṉai kaḻalkaḷ, kaṭu narakam pukal oḻitta,
vāṭṭāṟṟu em perumāṉai valaṅ kurukūrc caṭakōpaṉ
pāṭṭāya tamiḻ-mālai āyirattuḷ ip pattum
kēṭṭu ārār vāṉavarkaḷ, cevikku iṉiya ceñcollē. (X-6-11)

Translation

These songs ten, out of the thousand,
Composed by Caṭakōpaṉ, in chaste Tamil, the hymnal garland,
Adoring the Lord at Tiruvāṭṭāṟu, Who did graciously reveal

His lovely pair of feet and rid him of [Samsāra] the cruel hell,
Will unto the ears of the Celestials be a treat insatiable.

Notes

(i) This end-song, which usually details the benefits accrued to the chanters of the songs, in this decad, says that these songs will feast the ears of the Celestials, in Heaven sumptuously and that they will never feel satiated. On the face of it, this sounds like a departure from the general pattern of the end-songs of the other decads. But it is not so. What is actually meant to be conveyed by this song is that the chanters of this decad will surely go to Heaven and there again recite these ten songs, much to the delectation of the 'Nityas' (Eternal heroes) and 'Muktas' (released souls) over there, who would want to hear these songs, over and over again, without satiety.

(ii) Unlike Toṇṭaraṭippoṭi Āḻvār, who concludes his 'Tirumālai', the hymnal garland comprising fortyfive songs, referring to them, in all humility, as petty and immature, Nammāḻvār speaks of Tiruvāymoḻi, in such glorious terms as 'Ceñcol' (choice diction, sweet and chaste), a grand treat indeed, even to the exalted denizens of the Eternal Land who go into raptures the very moment these songs fall on their ears. The Āḻvār is but the mouth-piece of the Lord, Who sang these songs through His chosen medium. So sweet and scintillating are these songs that they throw the very medium into raptures. In this particular decad, the Lord enshrined in Tiruvāṭṭāṟu is depicted as the Grand Deliverer, ready to take the Āḻvār to Heaven, ridding him of the earthly bondage and all that goes with it. Even the chanters of this decad are assured of heavenly ascent and when they reach Heaven, those on the yonder side curiously enquire as to what is going on on earth. The new-comers would naturally refer to Saint Nammāḻvār and his glorious hymns as of outstanding

interest, whereupon the heavenly denizens would insist upon listening to these hymns sung by the former. And now, the ball is set in motion and the recital goes on, over and over again, pressed ever more by the incessant demands of the rapturous audience.

Tenth Centum—Seventh Decad (X-7)
(Ceñcol kavikāḷ)

Preamble

We saw the Āḷvār bursting with joy in the last decad. The Lord, Who stuck fast to the Āḷvār's heart, would now want to get hold of the Āḷvār's entire physical frame, limb by limb, like unto the flies swarming, in and around the jack-fruit. Well, what is the Lord's fascination for this elemental body, which the gnostics (Jñānis) have no hesitation in condemning as foul and are ready to give up, any moment? The sweet aroma of spiritual awakening, emanating from the Jñāni's body is indeed very pleasing to the Lord, Who, therefore, covets him and adores him, in that mortal frame, with all its dirt and stench, like unto the erotic lover doting on the body of his beloved, unmindful of its drawbacks. Do not the ladies wear, on their locks, the fragrant root, dug out of the earth, without shaking off the earthen particles of dust, lest it should diminish the fragrance?

In the case of the Āḷvār, the Lord bore unlimited love for him and He was even thinking in terms of lifting him up to heaven, with this very body. The Āḷvār, who got scent of this extraordinary thinking on the part of the Lord, even apprehended that the prolongation of his stay in this abode, in his material body, might be due to the misplaced affection of the Lord for his physical frame. The Āḷvār, therefore, realised the imperative need of his disabusing the Lord of his notions, in this regard. As a matter of fact, the Āḷvār is now free to dictate terms to the Lord in accordance with the latter's ardent desire to serve the former. The Āḷvār could, therefore, advise the Lord to do certain things and desist from doing certain other things. In the latter category would fall the Lord's contemplated move to lift the Āḷvār bodily to Heaven. Cornered thus, the Lord abandoned His over-ambitious project, submitting to the Āḷvār's will. That the Sovereign Lord

should desist from putting through His cherished desires, purely in deference to the Āḷvār's mandatory injunction, excites the Āḷvār's admiration of the Lord's amazing simplicity and tender solicitude, all the more. Literally lost in contemplation of these extra-ordinary traits of the Lord, the Āḷvār could regain his normal composure only after quite some length of time. Therefore it is, he puts others on their guard in this decad, lest they should also fare likewise, meditating on the Lord's amazing simplicity and loving condescension. This is just like men who have struggled through deep waters and got ashore, cautioning others wading through the waters against the treacherous pit-falls which they would do well to avoid, thus placing before others the benefit of their own experience. Actually, the Āḷvār is warning like-minded poets, steeped in the selfless enjoyment of the Lord's auspicious traits, not to get involved in these enthralling traits of the Lord but just skip over them, lest they should also be ensnared and get bogged down, as he did.

The Lord, who exhibited such a great predilection for the Āḷvār's physical frame, is depicted, in this decad, as the One enshrined in Tirumāliruñcōlai (in Tamil Nāḍu). Omni-scient though, the Lord's love for the Jñāni is so deep and intense that He dotes on the physical frame of the Jñāni, which the latter detests, as foul and despicable. The Lord has to be weaned away from His misplaced blandishment of the Jñāni's body by the latter's stern advice to desist from it, seeing that it is made up of the elements and is full of dirt and stench and the Lord shall not, therefore, defile and desecrate the exalted Heaven by introducing therein his physical body. vide aphorism 185 of 'Ācārya Hṛdayam', characterising the Lord at Tirumāliruñcōlai as the one doting on the the Jñāni's despicable body.

ceñcol kavikāḷ! uyir kāttu āṭceymmiṉ; tirumāliruñcōlai
vañcak kaḷvaṉ, mā māyaṉ, māyak kaviyāy vantu, eṉ
neñcum uyirum uḷ kalantu,niṉṟār aṟiyāvaṇṇam, eṉ
neñcum uyirum-avai uṇṭu, tāṉē āki, niṟaintāṉē. (X–7–1)

Translation

Beware, Ye poets, singing songs, sweet and chaste,
Better be all attention, as you sing, else you can't subsist;

The Lord in mount Tirumāliruñcōlai is the mysterious One,
Who does deceit and stealth practise; unto me He held on,
Ostensibly to sing these songs but into my heart and soul
Secretly He did dissolve and consumed them all;
Thus displacing me, He did attain His stature full.

Notes

(i) *Poets, sweet and chaste*: Poets composing songs in elegant diction, abounding in choice words, pregnant with meaning, are said to be sweet and if they also happen to be selfless singers of the Lord's glory, they are chaste indeed. This combined appellation would, however, cover only a few poets of the eminence of the first three Āḻvārs (Poikai, Pēy and Pūtattāḻvār), the super poets, thrilling with spiritual joy and throbbing with God-love. To this exalted band of poets, the Āḻvār utters the warning, as in this song. Their very existence will be imperilled if they ever trod upon the plank of the Lord's 'Saulabhya', simplicity galore, which will choke them down, in admiration, even to the point of losing themselves altogether. Evidently, the artist has to make sure of his existence, first and foremost, so that his art can flourish. When the art takes the form of service unto the Lord (Vācika Kaiṅkarya), it is but appropriate that the Āḻvār warns the artists in question against the danger lurking in the field. If they are to ensure steady and unremitting service unto the Lord, they should not go anywhere near the Lord's enthralling traits of simplicity, easy accessibility and tender solicitude, which had rendered the Āḻvār insensate thrice, the period of suspended animation lasting as long as six months on each such occasion. The Āḻvār is thus planting the danger signal, in the vulnerable spot, for the guidance of the fellow-poets of his ilk.

Sri Rāmānuja would have it, in this context, that the person to be saved is not the fellow-artist but the Lord Himself. When the Lord, in His unbounded love for the Jñāni's physical frame, pounces upon him, if the Jñāni went on repelling His advances, surely, he may have to lose the Lord altogether. Actually, the Āḻvār reverently called the Lord's attention to His trait of subserving the devotees (āśṛtapāratantarya) and, in the exercise thereof, He was made to desist from His ravishing love for the devotee's body, frail and foul. Thus inhibited from the pursuit of His natural inclination, the Lord stood aloof from the Āḻvār who, however, got completely lost in rapturous meditation on the Lord's remarkable docility in heeding his humble request. The Āḻvār, therefore, warns the fellow-artists not to fare likewise and lose the Lord in the manner he did, but conform to His wishes and place no obstruction in His path and thus preserve Him.

(ii) When the Lord initially entered the Āḻvār's heart, the latter was made to feel that He did so only to establish His supremacy over him. But then, He played His stealthy pranks by reversing the natural order of things and displaying the riotous love of the ardent lover. The pity of it is that the Āḻvār fell into His trap, notwithstanding the prior knowledge he had of the Lord, in this respect. Well, therein lies the Lord's mystery to which all of us cannot but succumb. All that the Lord applied for, at the outset, was a little space in the heart-region of the Āḻvār, so as to produce from there songs of rare excellence and the Āḻvār readily responded to the Lord's request, as he was himself wanting to sing such songs. But what happened! He who wanted just that space for the tip of His little finger to enter, got His head penetrated as well. Is this not stealth, pure and simple? What else is it but deceit, on His part?

[Oh, what a pity! there is such a miserable dearth of interest for these priceless gems of thought, imbedded in the Āḻvār's glorious hymns, as unfolded by our great Ācāryas. There are hardly a few who would come forward to delve deep into this vast treasure of Divine Love and it is only to be hoped that, with the

publication of the present glossary, their numbers would swell much beyond all expectations].

tāṉē āki, niṟaintu, ellā ulakum uyirum tāṉē āy,
tāṉē yāṉ eṉpāṉ āki, taṉṉait tāṉē tutittu, eṉakkut
tēṉē, pālē, kaṉṉalē, amutē, tirumāliruñcōlaik
kōṉē āki, niṉṟolintāṉ-eṉṉai muṟṟum uyir uṇṭē. (X–7–2)

Translation

Me the Lord did, in full, consume
And now full has He become;
The inner soul of worlds and beings, one and all
Stands now transformed into me, I do feel,
He lauds Himself thro' me and sweet unto me
Like candy and nectar, milk and honey,
Lord of Tirumāliruñcōlai He has now become.

Notes

(i) The Āḻvār finds that the Lord, Who mingled with him, completely displaced him and spread Himself out, in full, over the entire body of the Āḻvār; nay, He attained perfection and His sovereign stature only after this event. He could become God indeed only after the songs of His glory flowed from the sweet lips of the Āḻvār. It can be recalled that it is the Āḻvār who asserted the Supremacy of the Lord, vide II-2 and IV-10 of this hymnal.

(ii) The present predicament, in which the Āḻvār, basically the Lord's vassal, is being subserved by Him, has been aptly described by the great Nampiḷḷai in his unique diction, as follows: Dislodged from his normal stance, the Āḻvār gropes in vain to get at himself; all that he could discover, in the process, is that he is being carried aloft over the Lord's head.

(iii) The Lord is not merely the object of laudation but the very author of laudation, singing, as He does His own glory through the medium of the Āḻvār. If, in the end-song of each decad, it is said that it is Caṭakōpaṉ's (Āḻvār's) utterance, well, it is the Lord, Who made him say so.

(iv) The Lord is exceedingly delicious to the Āḻvār, but instead of his drinking deep of that insatiable nectar, the Lord forestalled him and drank him up, leaving no trace of him behind.

eṉṉai muṟṟum uyir uṇṭu, eṉ māya ākkai-itaṉuḷ pukku,
eṉṉai muṟṟum tāṉē āy niṉṟa, māya ammāṉ cēr
teṉ naṉ tirumāliruñcoḷait ticai kaikūppic cērnta yāṉ
iṉṉum pōvēṉēkolō? eṉkol ammāṉ tiru-aruḷē? (X–7–3)

Translation

The mysterious Sire in Tirumāliruñcōlai did my life consume in full,
Entered He my material body and displaced me so well
That in Him I stand transformed, heart and Soul;
Facing south, Him I did adore with joined palms
And His vassal have I now become,
Shall I from here go elsewhere, leaving Him,
What indeed is the extent of His grace supreme?

Notes

(i) The Āḻvār re-iterates that the Lord consumed him, in full, heart and Soul, deeming it a matter of great privilege and supreme joy, as if He had attained something unattainable. Nampiḷḷai has it that the Lord's greatness and grandeur got heightened by His contact with the Āḻvār, even as His excellence shot up, while in conjunction with Goddess Mahālakṣmi, c.f. "Yasya sā janakātmajā, aprameyaṃ hi tat tejaḥ" (Valmīki Rāmāyaṇa) which says that Lord Rāma's prowess grew up to unlimited dimensions after His union with Sītā, the daughter of King Janaka.

(ii) The Lord at Tirumāliruñcōlai bestowed on the Āḻvār's physical frame boundless love, although the Āḻvār was disgustingly aware of its drawbacks and was keen, as ever, on giving it up. The Āḻvār admired the Lord

whose love for him shot up to such incredible lengths, the pilgrim centre where He lovingly resided and the very direction in which it was located. Would he, therefore, think of looking beyond this favourite centre of the Lord whose hot favourite he is? It is indeed bewildering that the Lord's love for the Āḻvār has not reached the limits of satiety, even after His mingling with him so thoroughly, displacing him, as it were, and nullifying his separate entity. The Āḻvār is aghast with wonder, at the influx of the Lord's grace, defying description and baffling his imagination.

eṉkol ammāṉ tiru-aruḷkaḷ– ulakum uyirum tāṉē āy,
naṉku eṉ uṭalam kaiviṭāṉ; ñālattūṭē naṭantu, uḻakki,
teṉ koḷ ticaikkut tilatamāy niṉṟa tirumāliruñcōlai
naṅkaḷ kuṉṟam kaiviṭāṉ, naṇṇā acurar naliyavē? (X–7–4)

Translation

What indeed is the extent of my Sire's lovely grace!
Unto my body He holds on with love supreme and the sacred Mount,
Tirumāliruñ Cōlai He sticks to likewise, the crest jewel of the South,
The Soul Supreme of all things and beings, He did traverse
The whole Earth so as to crush the ungodly Asuras.

Notes

(i) The text of the song, in original, refers to the Lord's peregrination on Earth but the inner meaning thereof seems to be that, under the pretext of spanning the entire universe as Tṛvikrama, the Lord was actually in search of a favourite spot where He could hold uninterrupted rapport with the Āḻvār and enjoy him to His heart's fill. Tirumāliruñcōlai was the beauty spot, thus chosen by the Lord and it is there that the Lord lavished His affections on the Āḻvār. The Lord's love of that place stems from the realisation of the fact that it is there that He could enjoy the Āḻvār, in the manner He did. In other words, the Lord thoroughly enjoyed the Āḻvār, body and Soul and Mount Tirumāliruncōlai also, as the breeding ground of the Lord's enjoyment of the Āḻvār. Incidentally, this special felicity of the Lord floored the hostile Asuras down, with envy.

(ii) The Sovereign Lord, above wants of any kind, is so madly in love with the Āḻvār and hankers after his material body, like unto a wayward prince lavishing his affections on a low-caste woman, literally bound to her feet. The Āḻvār euphemistically refers to the Lord's bewilderment, as His grace, instead of curtly naming it as delusion or mental aberration.

(iii) As already elucidated in X-4-4, the Lord's stay in the pilgrim centres is not an end in itself but only the means for the reclamation of His subjects, His ultimate destination being the heart-centre of the spiritually regenerated subjects.

(iv) *Crushing the ungodly Asuras*: This is interpreted in two ways:

(*a*) The Asuras, who prattle heresies, that is, go about shouting that the Lord is devoid of form and attributes, dwindle down with shame the moment they see the Lord in His worshippable Form in Tirumāliruñcōlai, in all His splendour.

(*b*) Those, that hitherto belittled the greatness of Saint Nammāḻvār, in terms of his parentage and all that, also shrink down with shame, when they see the Lord's profusion of love for the Āḻvār.

naṇṇā acurar nalivu eyta, nalla amarar polivu eyta,
eṇṇātaṉakaḷ ēṉṉum nal muṉivar iṉpam talaiciṟappa,
paṇ ār pāṭal iṉ kavikaḷ yāṉāyt taṉṉāit tāṉ pāṭi,
teṉṉā eṉṉum-eṉ ammāṉ, tirumāliruñcōlaiyāṉē. (X–7–5)

Translation

My Sire, Who into me dissolved and sang songs, sweet and chaste,
Humming joyfully, which sealed the hostile Asuras' fate

But made the friendly Devas exult, which sent into raptures
The meditative sages who keep wishing the expansion evermore,
Of His auspicious attributes and glory great,
Is the One who has Tirumāliruñcōlai, as His habitat.

Notes

(i) "What a great connoisseur and how deeply interested!" exclaims the Āḻvār, when he sees the Lord who mingled with him and made him sing this great hymnal of Tiruvāymoḻi, humming with joy, as He listened to these songs.

(ii) The friendly Devas flourish while the Asuras, hostile and ungodly, perish, as a result of the Lord's incarnations. The same results are achieved by Tiruvāymoḻi also. The Lord's devotees prosper by learning and chanting Tiruvāymoḻi while the ungodly heretics get badly exposed by this soul-stirring hymnal, cutting across their ill-conceived tenets, their false doctrines and foul rhetoric. This is best illustrated by the following episode:

Kṛmikaṇṭa, a Cōḻa king carried a crusade against Vaiṣṇavism. When his little son succeeded the felonious father, he observed, with great feeling, "Alas! what has my father done? How stupid of him to have fancied that Vaiṣṇavism could be wiped out by just demolishing a temple or two! Did he not know that, unlike the dead walls of the temple, Vaiṣṇavism is bounded by the living walls of Tiruvāymoḻi and Rāmāyaṇa, the two impregnable fortresses?"

(iii) At a conclave held by the sages, it was felt that there was, as yet, no hymn, which lauded adequately the Lord's auspicious Form, attributes and cosmic wealth and that they should all pray unto the Lord to get the void duly filled up. These very sages met again after the advent of Tiruvāymoḻi. While they were jubilant that their prayers had been heard and that 'Tiruvāymoḻi' was the very thing they had pined for, they found that this great hymnal had covered, *in toto*, the Lord's attributes, wealth, manifestations etc. They, therefore, wished that the Lord should have many more of these, affording scope for further laudation of them all! Here then is a grand reorientation of their intial trend of thought, which at once proclaims Tiruvāymoḻi's greatness and grandeur as the laudatory hymnal, *par excellence*.

tirumāliruñcōlaiyāṉē āki, ceḻu mūvulakum taṉ
oru mā vayiṟṟiṉ uḷḷē vaittu, ūḻi ūḻi talaiyaḷikkum
tirumāl, eṉṉai āḷum māl, civaṉum piramaṉum kāṇātu
aru māl eyti, aṭi parava, aruḷai īnta ammāṉē. (X–7–6)

Translation

The Supreme Lord Whom even Civaṉ and Piramaṉ couldn't attain,
Did on them shed His grace, when they intensely adored
His lovely feet; He did in his stomach unique sustain
The three worlds bright, at the end of each epoch and delivered;
That Tirumāl stands now in Tirumāliruñcōlai and is very keen
To enlist me as His vassal, shedding on me His love supreme.

Notes

(i) The Lord, who sustained inside His little stomach all the worlds during the deluge, now wants to sustain Himself by clinging to the Āḻvār of whom He is passionately enamoured.

(ii) The Lord, who is well beyond the reach of even the exalted Śiva and Brahmā, is now after the Āḻvār and it is only to get at him that He has come down to Tirumāliruñcōlai.

aruḷai ī eṉ ammāṉē! eṉṉum mukkaṇ- ammāṉum,
teruḷ koḷ piramaṉ-ammāṉum, tēvar-kōṉum, tēvarum,
iruḷkaḷ kaṭiyum muṉivarum, ēttum ammāṉ tirumalai—
maruḷkaḷ kaṭiyum maṇimalai-tirumāliruñcōlai malaiyē. (X–7–7)

Translation

Tirumāliruñcōlai, the lovely mount, which dispels all ignorance,
Is where stays our Lord Who is well adored with great reverence
By the triple-eyed Sire, Piramaṉ, famed for clear intelligence,
The Devas and their Chief and sages who steer clear of dark nescience.

Note

Seeing that Tirumāliruñcōlai is the place from where all that felicity, currently enjoyed by him, flows, the Āḻvār now adores that mountain itself, as the one that dispels ignorance and all other kindred impediments which stand between us and our destined goal. What more? It is the place coveted by the Lord who is adored by the exalted Devas, Śivā and Brahmā and enlightened sages, with deep devotion.

tirumāliruñcōlai malaiyē, tiruppāṟkaṭalē, eṉ talaiyē,
tirumāl vaikuntamē, taṉ tiruvēṅkaṭamē, eṉatu uṭalē,
aru mā māyattu eṉatu uyirē, maṉamē, vākkē, karumamē,
oru mā noṭiyum piriyāṉ-eṉ ūḻi mutalvaṉ, oruvaṉē. (X–7–8)

Translation

The Lord Supreme, the first cause of all things, shall not bear
Being apart, even for a trice, from my head, held on a par
With Mount Tirumāliruñcōlai and the Milky Ocean, my physical frame,
Coveted by Him like the high Heaven and Mount Tiruvēṅkaṭam,
My soul, badly mixed up with matter, my thought, word and deed.

Notes

(i) The Āḻvār is amazed at the astounding love exhibited by the Lord unto him, rather every inch of his body, easily the aggregate of the love borne by Him for the sacred centres of front-rank eminence, like Mount Tirumāliruñcōlai, Mount Tiruvēṅkaṭam, the Milky Ocean and the High Heavens (Śrī Vaikuṇṭa). So deep and intense is the Lord's love that He shall not brook separation from the Āḻvār's physical frame and each anatomical part thereof, even for a split second.

(ii) The text of the song, as in the original, makes it out that the Lord, who lavished all His affections on each of the holy centres, referred to above, bestowed all that love on each one of the Āḻvār's limbs exclusively. This is precisely how sage Saubhari enjoyed marital bliss with each one of his fifty wives, all at once, assuming as many forms. Each one of the fifty spouses could thus assert that her husband was in her exclusive possession and enjoyment and had nothing to do with any one else.

(iii) All things and beings subsist in Him, both in the primordial or the unevolved, unmanifest state as well as in the evolved, manifested condition, not being viable by themselves, otherwise than in conjunction with Him. And now, that very Lord cannot brook even a moment's separation from the Āḻvār, as if the former subsists in the latter and cannot claim viability, on His own.

ūḻi mutalvaṉ oruvaṉē eṉṉum oruvaṉ, ulaku ellām
ūḻitōṟum taṉṉuḷḷē paṭaittu, kāttu, keṭuttu, uḻalum
āḻivaṇṇaṉ, eṉ ammāṉ, am taṉ tirumāliruñcōlai—
vāḻi, maṉamē!–kaiviṭēl; uṭalum uyirum maṅka oṭṭē. (X–7–9)

Translation

Lose not your hold, my mind, on Mount Tirumāliruñcōlai, Cool and lovely,
The seat of my majestic Sire, the One and One only,
Who did all things create, at the appropriate times,
In sole exercise of His will, sustained and dissolved them,
Persevering thus, may you, my mind, prosper ;
And may it please You, my Lord, to give up Your glamour
For my body and life and see that quickly they do wither.

Note

In the seventh song of this decad, the Āḻvār adored Mount Māliruñcōlai itself, as the one from which all that bliss,

currently experienced by him, flows. For that very reason, the Āḷvār now advises his mind not to relax its grip on this mascot of a mountain. On hearing the Āḷvār's address to his mind, the Lord would appear to have addressed Himself not to give up the Āḷvār's body, as it was in this body, out of the vast succession of bodies occupied by him, down the ages, He was able to get hold of the Āḷvār. This naturally frightens the Āḷvār who is terribly keen on the quick dissipation and disseverence of his material body. The Āḷvār, therefore, prays unto the Lord that He should no longer desire his foul body but despise it, so as to bring about the early extinction of his body and the current span of life over here. One thing is quite clear from this, namely, the Āḷvār's prolonged existence in this abode is not due to his sins (Prārabda Karma) but due to the Lord's overwhelming love for the Āḷvār's physical frame, making the Āḷvār plead, as above.

maṅka oṭṭu uṉ mā māyai-tirumāliruñcōlai mēya
naṅkaḷ kōṉē! yāṉē nī āki, eṉṉai aḷittāṉē!
poṅku aimpulaṉum, poṟi aintum, karumentiriyam, aimpūtam,
iṅku iv uyir ēy pirakiruti, māṉ, āṅkāram, maṉaṅkaḷē. (X-7-10)

Translation

My Lord in Tirumāliruñcōlai, You are my Saviour great,
Become one with me; from your mysterious tangle, the agglomerate
Of the surging senses five, the five sensory organs,
The motor organs five, the elements five, the spirit in conjunction
With the primordial matter, the great principle, called 'mahān',
Ego and the mind, do disentangle me and deliver.

Notes

(i) In the preceding song, the Āḷvār pleaded lustily with the Lord that He should no longer desire his foul body but despise it. But the Lord could not desist from lavishing His affections on the Āḷvār's body. In order to remedy this state of affairs, the Āḷvār had to bring home to the Lord the unwholesome composition of his physical body and argue his case for the discarding of this body. The Lord would not, however, easily give in; if the Āḷvār's soul was very dear to the Lord, so was the body containing that soul. Does any one break the jar containing the costly cosmetics? Surely, the container derives its importance from the thing contained. Finding the Lord arguing along these lines, the Āḷvār had perforce to expatiate on the imperative necessity of the Lord despising his material body which, if at all any eminence could be attributed to it, is eminently fit to be discarded. This is how the Āḷvār successfully argued his case for the Lord discarding the former's Prākṛti (material) body, right here:

"My Lord, have You not Yourself stated, in Your Song Celestial, that it is impossible for anyone to cross beyond 'Māyā', the 'Prakṛti' set up by You, which usually hinders liberation by concealing Your real nature and helps only those who have taken refuge in You? May it, therefore, please you to desist from lavishing Your affections on this prākṛtik nest, You have woven around me. I need hardly remind You that the very purpose of Your coming down here, from the high Heavens, is to bring to the fore Your special trait of subservience to Your devotees and get it stabilised. You could as well have stayed on in the yonder land, if you mean to assert Your independence even at this end, without listening to my oft-repeated request not to cling to my foul body anymore; You need not have taken the trouble to secure a foot-hold on Mount Tirumāliruñcōlai. If 'You' have become 'I' and thus established perfect identity between us, what is not palatable to me should be equally so to You. But then, You seem to be in no mood to give up Your morbid fascination for my material body. Let me now restate my case, in greater detail, so as to impress upon you the despicability of this material body, You are doting on."

(ii) So saying, the Āḷvār enumerates the twenty four principles, comprised in this material body of ours, with all its

dirt and stench, but nevertheless inducing the illusory attachment to it, with its meretricious charms. In VIII-8, the Lord had impressed upon the Āḻvār, rather imparted to him the experience or realisation of the true nature of the 'Jīva', the individual soul, too subtle to be comprehended even by the enlightened yogis through strenuous mental effort. Now, it is the turn of the Āḻvār to draw the attention of the Lord to the characteristics of 'Acit', the inert matter, a reversal indeed of the master-disciple relationship!

mān āṅkāram maṉam keṭa, aivar vaṉkaiyar maṅka,
tāṉ āṅkāramāyp pukku, tāṉē taṉē āṉānait
tēṉ āṅkārap poḻil kurukūrc caṭakōpaṉ col āyirattuḷ
māṉ āṅkārattu ivai pattum tirumāliruñcōlai malaikkē.
(X–7–11)

Translation

These songs ten, out of the thousand composed by Caṭakōpaṉ
Of Kurukūr, abounding in orchards lovely, which mention
How the Lord did his body and soul lovingly enter,
Become one with him and did his material contacts sever,
Do unto Mount Tirumāliruñcōlai pertain.

Notes

That this decad pertains to the holy centre of Tirumāliruñcōlai is evident from every song in this decad. The special significance of this fact being mentioned in this end-song can, however, be appreciated in two ways, as indicated below :

(i) In II-10, the Āḻvār had referred to this holy centre, abounding in orchards, young and gay, as one of bewildering charm. The nature of the soil is such that even Nammāḻvār, endowed with knowledge, clear and perfect, by no less than the Omni-scient Lord Himself, was thrown off his feet by the exquisite charm of Lord Aḻakar, enshrined in this centre and he entertained doubts whether the Lord's glowing crown was but the upward expansion of His facial glow and the lotus seat on which He appeared to be standing was but the reflection of His dazzling feet and so on. And now, it is but the corrupting influence of that very soil that made the Lord hanker after the physical body of the Āḻvār with fantastic fascination.

(ii) Again, it was due to the Lord's contact with this particular soil, that He could overcome His fascination for the Āḻvār's material frame. The object underlying the Lord's manifestation on this soil, in His worshippable Form as Aḻakar, is to highlight His creed of subserving His devotees. It was in pursuance of this creed that He yielded to the Āḻvār's advice, not to caress his body any longer.

The benefit, accrued to the chanters of this decad, could be taken as the severance of the material contact with their bodies, comprising the twentyfour principles, enumerated in the tenth song, as the Āḻvār prays unto the Lord, in this decad, for such severance.

Tenth Centum—Eighth Decad (X-8)
(Tirumāliruñcōlai)

Preamble

In the sixth decad of this centum, the Lord was indeed in great hurry to take the Āḻvār to Heaven but His speed got somewhat arrested, in the last decad, due to His passionate love for the Āḻvār's physical frame as well and His resultant desire to lift him up bodily to Heaven. The Āḻvār had to do quite a bit of talking and impress upon the Lord, the non-feasibility of his ascent to Heaven, in this physical body and ultimately the Lord had to yield. And now, when the stage is eventually set for the Āḻvār's Heaven-bound journey, the Āḻvār intercepts and accosts the Lord as follows :

" My Lord, how is it that You, Who are now in such great hurry to put me in Heaven, had coolly allowed me to drift and struggle in this land of dark nescience, all these days? Pray let me know what precisely are the underlying reasons for Your age-long indifference and Your present predilection. " (see the ninth song of this decad).

The Lord was quite aware that the Āḻvār, endowed by Him with knowledge full and complete, was a hard nut to crack and he could effectively counter all His arguments. He, therefore, discreetly kept silent, looking away from the Āḻvār, leaving it to the latter to conclude that it would but be futile to question the ways of the Sovereign Lord with unbridled independence. The Āḻvār was also quick to realise that the present dispensation of the Lord was but the influx of His sweet spontaneous grace, totally unrelated to the merit in him. It is this voluntary grace of the Lord that the Āḻvar dwells upon, in this decad, and rejoices.

tirumāliruñcōlai malai eṉṟēṉ; eṉṉa,
tirumāl vantu, eṉ neñcu niṟaiyap pukuntāṉ;
kuru mā maṇi untu puṉal poṉṉit teṉpāl
tirumāl ceṉṟu cērvitam teṉ tiruppērē. (X-8-1)

Translation

Lovely Tiruppēr on the south bank of the river Poṉṉi,
Whose flood waters are with costly rubies laden,
Is the favourite resort of Tirumāl Who got into my heart
And spread Himself out in full, when I did just articulate
The name of Tirumāliruñcōlai, the holy Mount.

Note

The Āḻvār brings into focus, the Lord's redemptive grace, shed on the subjects with sweet spontaniety, on the slightest pretext. There is the vicarious reward from the Lord Who treats even the casual mention, by some one, of His names and those of the pilgrim centres, without any religious fervour behind it, as a genuine exercise in chanting these names, with due reverence. The Āḻvār's lips casually uttered the name of Mount Tirumāliruñcōlai, least aware of its special sanctity and yet, the Lord took his utterance at its face value and entered the Āḻvār's heart. Even as water finds a small aperture enough to pass through and fill the entire area within, the cloud-hued Lord entered the Āḻvār's body, mind and soul. So full of the Āḻvār is He now that He has literally become the Āḻvār. The Lord, who coveted the Āḻvār, to such an extent, is the One residing

with Śrī Mahalakṣmi, the Divine Mother, at Tiruppēr (Appa Kuṭattāṉ) on the South bank of the river Kāvēri (also known as Poṉṉi). It is this holy conjunction of the Lord and the Divine Mother, that induced the Lord to shed His grace on the Āḻvār, in such super-abundance, overlooking the fact that his mention of the name of Mount Tirumāliruñcōlai was much-too-casual, lip-deep and no more than that.

pērē uṟaikiṉṟa pirāṉ iṉṟu vantu,
pērēṉ eṉṟu, eṉ neñcu niṟaiyap pukuntāṉ;
kār ēḻ, kaṭal ēḻ, malai ēḻ ulaku uṇṭum
ārā vayiṟṟāṉai aṭaṅkap piṭittēṉē. (X-8-2)

Translation

My Sire, Who does in Tiruppēr dwell, has now come
Unto me, with delight immense and in my heart stands firm;
His fill He hadn't although he gulped down the clouds seven,
The seven oceans, the seven mountains and the worlds seven,
But now He feels full, spreading Himself out inside me.

Notes

(i) The Supreme Lord did sustain, during the great deluge, all the worlds, with their vast contents and all beings, with no exception whatever. Even so, He did not feel full at all. This void was, of course, due to the absence of His contact with the Āḻvār and it was only to overcome this deficiency that the Lord stationed Himself along with His Divine Consort at Tiruppēr, on the south bank of the river Kāvēri, a vantage position from which He could enter the Āḻvār's body, under the slightest pretext.

(ii) Even as Lakṣmī, the lotus-born, gave up the lotus flower, the seat of her birth and got Herself implanted on the Lord's chest, repeatedly saying, "I won't from Him be apart, even for a trice", the Lord, Who got inside the Āḻvār's heart, went on saying, "I won't depart from here", as if some one had asked Him whether He intended to stay on there or go away after a while.

(iii) The Lord's entry into the Āḷvār's body, heart and soul, gives one the impression of His full and complete pervasion of the Āḷvār but the fulness actually pertains to the Lord and it is He that has now become full.

piṭittēṉ; piṟavi keṭuttēṉ; piṇi cārēṉ;
maṭittēṉ maṉai vāḷkkaiyuḷ niṟpatu ōr māyaiyai;
koṭik kōpura māṭaṅkaḷ cuḷ tiruppērāṉ
aṭic cērvatu eṉakku eḷitu āyiṉavāṟē! (X–8–3)

Translation

How easily could I my Lord attain, Who dwells
In Tiruppēr, enclosed by towers with banners aloft and castles tall!
Firm indeed is my grip of His feet which cut out pestilence,
My cycle of births and that elusive trap, the dark nescience.

Notes

(i) The Āḷvār keeps musing over the manner in which the Lord has come and mingled with him, out of His spontaneous grace and wonders how the Lord became so easily accessible to him. Having got hold of the Lord's feet, he is determined not to relax his grip over them hereafter. The benefits flowing from his attainment of the Lord's feet are: (1) the dreadful cycle of birth and death, perpetuating his bondage, has ground to a halt; (2) with the cessation of birth, pestilence, its by-product, has also been wiped out and (3) severance of his age-long association with Māyā, the Primordial matter, which brings on the changes of state and the chain of miseries incidental thereto, keeping its victims earth-bound and sense-buried.

(ii) An anecdote cited, in this contest, in Iṭu Commentary, is reproduced below :

Saint Rāmānuja was having a stroll in the verandah of the mutt, just after a meal, as a constitutional exercise, but abruptly recanted without proceeding further on, as usual. This was because he was reciting this

particular decad and as he dwelt on the line of this song, referring to the Āḷvār's severance of his age-long association with 'Māyā' which had kept him in bondage from time immemorial, the Saint also abruptly stopped strolling on and entered the hall. Empār, the enlightened disciple, who was watching this through the small opening in the door of the hall, kept ajar, instantly sized up the situation and enquired whether the Saint was reciting, just then, this particular line and the latter affirmed it.

eḷitāyiṉavāṟu, eṉṟu, ēṉ kaṇkaḷ kaḷippṟak
kaḷitu ākiya cintaiyaṉāyk kaḷikkiṉṟēṉ;
kiḷi tāviya cōlaikaḷ cūḷ tiruppērāṉ
teḷitu ākiya cēṇ-vicumpu taruvāṉē. (X–8–4)

Translation

The Lord dwelling in Tiruppēr, surrounded by orchards lovely,
The home of parrots, is on the point of bestowing on me
The immaculate Heaven of splendour great; rejoice do my eyes
That the high Heaven is brought by the Lord's grace
Within my easy reach and my mind with joy does dance.

Notes

(i) *The home of parrots*: This refers to the lovely gardens in Tiruppēr, where parrots are perched merrily. This could also refer to the township of Tiruppēr, inhabited by truth-loving, knowledgeable persons who would parrot-like repeat what they had gathered from their preceptors, without any distortion or deviation.

(ii) From this land of dark nescience to the yonder land of perpetual clarity and brightness, it is indeed a far cry. And yet, the Lord, in His unbounded grace, has come forward to grant the Āḷvār, Heaven. The Āḷvār is aghast with wonder at that what would otherwise be extremely difficult of attainment is now brought by the Lord within his easy reach, indeed the Lord's grace galore. The Āḷvār's eyes beam with joy and so does his mind.

vāṉē taruvāṉ eṉakkāy, eṉṉōṭu oṭṭi,
ūṉ ēy kurampai-itaṉuḷ pukuntu iṉṟu,
tāṉē taṭumāṟṟa viṉaikaḷ tavirttāṉ—
tēṉ ēy poḷil teṉ tiruppēr nakarāṉē. (X–8–5)

Translation

The Lord dwelling in Tiruppēr city, with orchards fine,
Where honey bees hum gaily, is intent on putting me in Heaven;
Pledged, as it were, He has unto me come, on His own
And, entering this fleshy body of mine,
Rid me of all impediments, the fruits of my past actions.

Notes

(i) The Āḷvār exclaims that the Lord, enshrined in Tiruppēr, not only took a vow that He would take him to Heaven but also rid him of all impediments, the 'Puṇya' and 'Pāpa', merit and demerit respectively, the fruits of his actions, good and bad. As a matter of fact, the Lord has, all along, been very keen on taking the Āḷvār to Heaven but nevertheless kept him on, in this abode, only to get all these hymns, sung by him for the edification and enjoyment of the devotees over here. Now that this purpose of the Lord has been achieved, the Āḷvār is on the very verge of his ascent.

(ii) The Lord's ardent fervour in taking the Āḷvār to Heaven is admirably elucidated here. He has taken a vow to grant the Āḷvār, the high Heaven, failing which He would forfeit His commanding position as the Lord of Heaven. This is indeed comparable with the solemn pledges the Lord had made during His incarnation as Rāma, once in regard to His crossing over to Laṅkā, through the sea, along with His army, and again, during His encounter with Rāvaṇa. The first oath was: "Adhya me maraṇam vāpi tharaṇam Sāgarasya vā" (either I get across the ocean or give up my life); the second one was: 'Arāvaṇamarāmam vā' (either Rāvaṇa or Rāma shall cease to be).

(iii) No doubt, the Lord was intent upon taking the Āḷvār bodily to Heaven but He had to yield to the Āḷvār's persistent demand to give up the idea. The next best He could do was to delve, with great delight, into the foul, fleshy body of the Āḷvār and cut out, *suo moto* (of His own accord) the ills and evils, separating the Āḷvār from Him. 'puṇya' (merit, accrued by dint of one's good deeds) is but a gold fetter while 'Pāpa' (sin or demerit devolving from bad deeds) is an iron fetter. A gold fetter is a fetter, all the same, and thus it is as much an impediment as the iron fetter, which sin is.

tiruppēr nakarāṉ, tirumāliruñcōlaip
poruppē uṟaikiṉṟa pirāṉ, iṉṟu vantu,
iruppēṉ eṉṟu, eṉ neñcu niṟaiyap pukuntāṉ
viruppē peṟṟu amutam uṇṭu kaḷittēṉē. (X–8–6)

Translation

The Lord in Tiruppēr city, Who does also dwell
In tirumāliruñcōlai and has many such abodes delectable,
Has this day got inside me and my heart He does fill,
Saying that there He will for ever stay; I do revel
In His love, drinking deep of that nectar insatiable.

Notes

(i) Many indeed are the enchanting abodes of the Lord in His worshippable Form and yet, He has entered the Āḷvār's heart as if He has nowhere else to go and now only He feels complacent as a 'Kṛta Kṛtya' (one who has discharged one's duty thoroughly), after getting Himself lodged in the Āḷvār's heart-region.

(ii) "*Has this day got inside me*": Why this day only and not yesterday or the day before? It only shows the dawn of the Lord's redemptive grace in having designed to come to the Āḷvār and get inside his heart, declaring that He will stay on, for ever, even as the exi'ed Rāma told Lakṣmaṇa in Pañcavaṭi that they would do well to set up their camp there under cover of the patronising

wings of their most beloved Jaṭâyu, the vulture-king.—'Iha vatsyâmi Soumitre! sârdha methena pakṣiṇā.

(iii) "*My heart, He does fill*": No doubt, the Lord stays inside the heart of every one, as the Internal Controller of one and all, including the demoniac Kamsa and Śiśupâla, but His stay inside the Āḷvār's heart makes all the difference. The Lord's stay inside the Āḷvār is not as a matter of routine duty, as in the case of the generality of His subjects, but one bursting with joy and it is this exuberance of God's love for him that the Āḷvār refers to here and revels in.

uṇṭu kaḷitteṟku umpar eṉ kuṟai-mēlait
toṇṭu ukaḷittu, anti toḷum collup peṟṟēṉ;
vaṇṭu kaḷikkum poḷil cūḷ tiruppērāṉ
kaṇṭu kaḷippa, kaṇṇuḷ niṉṟu akalāṉē? (X-8-7)

Translation

My Sire, Who dwells in Tiruppēr with its orchards fine,
Where bees, fed on honey, go gay, stays in my view all the time,
For my eyes to feast upon; unto me thus happily fed
What is there in heaven to enjoy? I have tasted
The bliss of service supreme and to its acme am I led
Uttering the word 'namaḥ' to show that unto Him I belong.

Notes

(i) Having tasted the supreme bliss of service unto the Lord, right here, by singing these love-laden songs, (Tiruvāymoḷi), the Āḷvār is led to pause and think what more could there be for him to enjoy on the yonder side of Heaven. Uttering the word 'namaḥ' or worship of the Lord, betokening one's realisation of the true nature of the soul that one is the exclusive vassal of the Lord, totally dependent on and belonging to Him, is the logical culmination of the enjoyment of the bliss of Divine Service (kaiṅkarya rasa) "Nama

ityeva vâdhinaḥ". Such a realisation having also dawned on the Āḷvār, what more does he need?

(ii) The Lord is now feasted upon continually, by the Āḷvār's eyes which languished before, for want of this glorious vision. What is even more astounding is His firm hold on the heart of the Āḷvār. It is but natural that the Āḷvār rejoices, recounting all this felicity heaped on him by the Lord, madly in love with him.

kaṇṇuḷ niṉṟu akalāṉ; karuttiṉkaṇ periyaṉ;
eṇṇil nuṇ poruḷ; ēḷ-icaiyiṉ cuvai tāṉē;
vaṇṇa nal maṇi māṭaṅkaḷ cūḷ tiruppērāṉ
tiṇṇam eṉ maṉattup pukuntāṉ-ceṟintu iṉṟē. (X-8-8)

Translation

Subtle beyond the comprehension of those who seek to comprehend
Is the Lord Supreme: the melodic essence of all music,
The Lord now in Tiruppēr, by glittering castles bound,
Is extra-keen on taking me to Heaven; He shan't brook
Being from my eyes apart and now it is certain indeed
That He has firmly entered my mind.

Notes

The Lord, too subtle to be comprehended by those who seek to comprehend Him through strenuous efforts, is now fiercely concentrating on the elaborate arrangements to be made in connection with the ensuing journey of the Āḷvār to Heaven. The Lord's vision stands continually in front of the Āḷvār, feasting his eyes, and he is enjoying right here the blessed rapport of 'Sadā paśyanti Sūrayaḥ', the incessant communion with the Lord, on the yonder side of Heaven, the marvellous experience gone through by the denizens over there, ever fresh and exhilarating.

The Lord is subtle beyond comprehension and, in any case, none, not even the Āḷvār, can gauge and comprehend the depth of the Lord's love unto him. The Lord's aesthetic

sense, His love for the art of music, can, at best, be summed up by saying that He is the melodic quintessence of the metrical sounds in their octaves. But then, the extent of His aesthetic delight, egging Him on to His profuse love for the Āḻvār and the manner in which He wants to exhibit it baffle all understanding.

iṉṟu eṉṉaip poruḷākki, taṉṉai eṉṉuḷ vaittāṉ;
aṉṟu eṉṉaip puṟampōkap puṉarttatu eṉ ceyvāṉ?
kuṉṟu eṉṉat tikaḻ māṭaṅkaḷ cūḻ tiruppēräṉ
oṉṟu eṉakku aruḷ ceyya, uṉarttal uṟṟēṉē. (X–8–9)

Translation

On me, despised and neglected for ages, the Lord has now turned
His attention and lodged Himself firm in my mind ;
May I ask the Lord at Tiruppēr, by solid mansions bound,
Why indeed He had shut His eyes on me all these days
But now sheds on me in super-abundance His grace,
Would He deign to explain to me the one or the other?

Notes

(i) This is the topical song of this decad. The gist of this song has alr ady been set out in the form of a dialogue, opened by the Āḻvār with the Lord, in the preamble to this decad. When asked by his disciple, Nañcīyar, as to what reply the Lord gave to the Āḻvār, Śrī Parāśara Bhaṭṭar would appear to have said ;

"The Lord has obviously no answer, as such. He, who had kept aloof from the Āḻvār all these days, putting one blame or the other at his door, now feels ashamed that he had not relcaimed him earlier, and, with His eyes fastened to the ground, He keeps scratching it with his toe."—a graphic description indeed, which conveys vividly that the Lord's dispensation, either way, springs from His Swātantarya (Independence, Free will), and not willing to say so to the Āḻvār, He discreetly kept silent. The position, in this regard, has been thrashed out in aphorisms 102 to 113 and 228 of 'Ācārya Hṛdayam'. This is summarised below.

Surely, it is the Lord's spontaneous grace that is now being shed on the Āḻvār, in super-abundance. According to his own admission, as we can cull out from his songs, the Āḻvār has not acquired any merit on his own through the pursuit of any one of the 'Sādhana traya', namely, Karma, Jñāna, Bhakti yogās, either in this birth or in the previous births. Right in this birth and that too, in a short time, God-love (Bhakti) of amazing dimensions, which would normally take ages of hard discipline to develop, has been generated in him by the Lord's sweet grace. As a matter of fact, all the effort, needed for engendering 'Bhakti' of this magnitude in the Āḻvār, has been solely on the part of the Lord, the Indefatigable Cultivator, Who sows the seed of God-love in the subject's mind and tills it to the point of fruition. It need not, for a moment, be doubted how the Lord's grace could be unilateral without the effective involvement of the subjects, by way of self-effort, directed towards earning the requisite merit, the eligibility for the descent on him of the Lord's grace. Well, even the twigs and tiny creatures of Ayodhyā went to Heaven, purely through Lord Rāma's grace while the enchanting music of Lord Kṛṣṇa's magic flute got even the trees and dumb creatures intoxicated with God-love. But then, it might be asked why the Lord should not extend such grace to one and all, instead of singling out the Āḻvār for the bestowal of His grace. This is tantamount to questioning the Lord's will and wisdom, overlooking the fundamental fact that He is the Sovereign Master, absolutely independent and, therefore, free to bestow His gifts on whomsoever He pitches upon, at His sweet will and pleasure. Tradition has it that, in the good olden days, when the king of the land passed away and there was none in the regular line of succession to succeed him, the choice of the new king was made in a peculiar way. Peculiar though, it was accepted

by the subjects without question. The crown elephant of the state would move about, holding a garland in its trunk. The person, on whom the elephant placed the garland, was crowned forthwith. Is the Sovereign Lord open to question if this elephant was not? Again, if the king lavished his affections on a particular lady, out of so many kept in his harem, none would dare to scrutinise and question why the king did so, when there were many others in his harem, equally charming, if not more.

(ii) Granting that the Āḻvār was not conscious of any merit in him, as such, could it be that the Lord redeemed him because of some hidden merit in him (ajñāta sukṛta) leading to vicarious reward? Well, the Āḻvār, endowed with knowledge, full and complete, clear and concise, who has thrown light on himself as well as many others through his mystic comprehension right from where he was, would certainly be conscious of the hidden merit in him, if there was any such thing at all. No doubt, the Āḻvār had a God-bent mind, soaked in God-love, but these traits of 'Adveṣa' (non-hatred and non-disinclination) and 'ābhimukya' (loving attention) towards God were not the outcome of his own merit but the work of God Himself. Did not the Āḻvār admit in II-7-8, that the Lord reconditioned his foul mind and redeemed it? Again, did he not acknowledge, in the immediately preceding song (II-7-7), that it was Vāmana, his Lord, Who ushered in him a mind, laid at His lotus feet, adoring Him all the time? It may be recalled, in this context, that Nampiḷḷai would say that it was not a case of reconditioning the Āḻvār's mind, so as to make it God-bent, but one of providing a new mind altogether from the Lord's strong-room, where valuables are stored up.

(iii) If the Āḻvār, who had strayed away, far too long, veered round and said that, by his own inclination, he lodged the Lord in his mind and that both he and his mind submitted to the Lord's loving care, it should be realised that it was through the Lord's strenuous and unremitting

endeavours that the Āḻvār could be brought round, in this manner. The mere inclination to submit oneself to the Lord's loving protection cannot, by any means, be regarded as the means employed for attaining Him, for, on the face of it, it is ludicrous to equate things which bear no comparison to each other. The casual utterance of the words 'Mādhava' and 'Tirumāliruñcōlai' without so much as the thought crossing one's mind that the former is the Lord's name and the latter, the name of a pligrim centre very dear to Him, could no doubt come in for reward at the hands of the merciful Lord, according to His extra-liberal standards of securing the vicarious redemption of His subjects. Even so, much-too-slender that these methods are, they can hardly be regarded as the means for the attainment of the Supreme Lord. As a matter of fact, there was a time when the Lord claimed the Āḻvār as His own, and the latter repelled the former, saying that he was his own and called upon the Lord to prove His claim by adducing the relevant evidence in support thereof. The Lord was knocked down, at every turn, by the recalcitrant subject, evidence such as the 'Vedas' and the utterances of the sages being dubbed partisan, one-sided and so on. When all arguments failed, the Lord had to wean round the Subject, crossing swords with Him, by exhibiting His enthralling Form. It was this exquisite charm of the Lord that induced God-love in the straying subject and made him realise and repent that he had expropriated the Lord's property, all along, that is, looked upon his soul as belonging to him whereas it actually belonged to the Lord and thus committed a grave theft (ātmāpahāra). When all is said and done, the Lord Himself constitutes the merit (Sukṛt) for the Āḻvār's deliverance and if the Lord's redemptive grace did not alight on the Āḻvār, so far and it materialised only now, no other explanation can be adduced except attributing this to the Lord's

sweet, spontaneous grace, alighting, at His will, on the subjects of His choice, as the Āḻvār himself has brought out now and again. Well, it is the influx of the Lord's grace that really matters and not the why and wherefore of it. Does any one who quenches the parching thirst, by drinking the milk of the cocanut, ever pause to examine beforehand how at all the milk got inside the cocanut?

uṟṟēṉ; ukantu paṇiceytu, uṉa pātam
peṟṟēṉ; Ītē iṉṉam vēṇṭuvatu, entāy !
kaṟṟār maṟaivāṇarkaḷ vāḻ tiruppēṟāṟku
aṟṟār aṭiyār-tamakku allal nillāvē. (X–8–10)

Translation

My Sire, Your lovely feet have I attained and rendered
Loving service unto You, singing these songs; what's now desired
Is but the extension of this bliss; the learned ones, well-versed
In the Vedic lore, solely devoted to you, my Lord,
In Tiruppēr enshrined, will from grief for ever be freed.

Notes

(i) After keeping quiet for a while, without furnishing any reply to the Āḻvār's query as in the last song, the Lord enquired of the Āḻvār what more he needed. The Āḻvār's reply is, as above. Having been assigned the blissful service of singing this great hymnal (Tiruvāymoḻi) there is indeed no greater felicity he could aspire. Immensely pleased with this reply, the Lord nodded His head with joy. Thereupon, the Āḻvār extolled the learned residents of Tiruppēr, rendering devoted service at the feet of the Lord enshrined there, as men well beyond the grip of grief.

(ii) It seems necessary, in this context, to clear the possible misconception that, by redeeming the Āḻvār, on His own, without any merit in him, the Lord laid Himself

open to the charge of partiality, leading to invidious distinction, shaking the very foundation of the Śāstras and thus paving the way for emancipation of the worldlings, *en masse*, (Sarva mukti). That the Lord is above blame will be seen straightway, if due note is taken of the fact that the Lord can do precious little to those who strike a divergent path and move away from Him, all the time. It is only when the human heart sparkles with God-love, that the Lord's advance towards man will make sense. Even so, the mere fact that one is God-bent, by virtue of the inherent nature of the Soul, endowed with intelligence, cannot impart to this attitude the stature of the 'means' for attaining Him, and in fact, there is no 'means' worth the name, comparable with the 'end' attained. It is a thousand pities that clarity is a far cry with quite a few people who stick to their guns with miserable obstinacy, always wanting to adduce some reason or the other, however negligible, smacking of personal effort for compelling the Lord's grace, depriving it of the element of sweet spontaniety.

nillā allal; nīḻ vayal cūḻ tiruppērmēl
nallār palar vāḻ kurukūrc caṭakōpaṉ
col ār tamiḻ āyirattuḷ ivai pattum
vallār toṇṭar āḻvatu-cūḻ poṉ vicumpē. (X–8–11)

Translation

The devotees, well-versed in these songs ten,
Out of the thousand composed in chaste Tamil by Caṭakōpaṉ
Of Kurukūr, the home of many good men, in adoration
Of the Lord at Tiruppēr, which rich fields adjoin,
The holy centre with hardly any room for affliction,
Will surely hold sway over the glittering Heaven.

Note

The chanters of this decad are assured not merely of their ascent to heaven but they will go there as masters and not as mere residents.

Tenth Centum—Ninth Decad (X-9)
(Cūḻ vicumpu aṇi mukil)

Preamble

In the last decad, the Āḷvār had put the Lord, a very inconvenient question and thereby put Him in quite an embarrassing predicament. Shorn of all quibblings, the Lord would have had to say, in reply, that it was in the exercise of His unbridled independence that He had kept the Āḷvār, deep down in the mire of Samsāra for ages, and now, invoking the self-same trait of His, He has been pleased to extend all the favours, currently enjoyed by the Āḷvār. It would, however, be hardly appropriate for Him to say so, expecially at this crucial juncture. For Him, it was now a veritable battle of wits and He skilfully tried to tide over this unenviable situation, rather, cover it up by calling upon the clouds and the oceans to roar like an orchestra, heralding the Āḷvār's ascent to Heaven and the inhabitants of all the seven islands to bestow on him their choicest offerings. This is how the errant priest, officiating at marriage ceremonies, covers up his inadvertent mistakes in regard to the recital of the Mantras, that is, mixing up the wrong texts pertaining to the funeral obsequies, in between. On such occasions, which might, of course, be few and far between, the clever priest covers his awkwardness by vociferously commanding the piper and the drummer to play their notes in a crescendo, thereby drowning his egregious blunder in that babel.

The sweet music and the fanfare of trumpets etc., from the land of the Kinnaras, the Gandharvas and the Garuḍas in the upper regions, hailing the Āḷvār's ascent to Heaven, are made to fall on the ears of the Āḷvār; the chanks and bugles sound all over, beautiful damsels with spear-shaped eyes sing in chorus the Āḷvār's glory and the 'Maruth Gaṇas' and the 'Aṣṭa Vasus' keep chanting the 'Stotras', the laudatory hymns continually. The upward journey of the Āḷvār to Heaven through the famous "Arcirādi Mārga", the propitiation of the Āḷvār by the Angels, *en route*, the Āḷvār's entry into Heaven and the grand ovation accorded to him by the denizens on the yonder side, his access to the gem-set hall where Lord Mahāviṣṇu holds His ceremonial Durbar, duly conducted by the guides nominated for the purpose, and attainment of the Lord's lotus feet—the whole panorama is

brought by the Lord within the Āḷvār's mental comprehension. The Āḷvār voices forth his experience, in this decad, in an esoteric manner, making it appear that the devotees of the Supreme Lord Śrīman Nārāyaṇa, Who ascended Heaven through this exalted route exclusively earmarked for them, were greeted all along the route and received with special honours by the denizens of the upper regions, showering praises on the new-comers, so on and so forth. It could also be deduced that the Āḷvār thereby intended to infuse confidence in the Śrī Vaiṣṇavas, the ardent devotees of Lord MahāViṣṇu, that they too shall surely attain the bliss, currently experienced by the Āḷvār.

cūḷ vicumpu aṉi mukil tūriyam muḻakkiṉa;
āḷ kaṭal alai tiraik kai eṭuttu āṭiṉa;—
ēḻ poḻilum vaḷam ēntiya eṉ appaṉ,
vāḻ pukaḻ nāraṇaṉ tamaraik kaṇṭu ukantē. (X–9–1)

Translation

The comely clouds in the sprawling sky did music roar,
The surging waves of the deep seas danced with joy, gifts rare,
The inhabitants of the islands seven did in their hands bear,
To greet with great joy, the on-coming devotees of my Sire
The beneficent Nāraṇaṉ of undying fame.

Notes

(i) This song describes the ecstatic manner in which even the inanimate clouds, which decorate the sprawling sky and the surging waves of the deep seas, came forward to greet the devotees of Lord Śrīman Nārāyaṇa of undying fame, during their ascent to the high Heavens. All the seven islands wore a festive appearance and their inhabitants, one and all, held, in their hands, their choicest gifts to be offered to these Heaven-bound souls.

(ii) What a grand poetic imagery! When the clouds sang, the waves of the seas danced in accompaniment. It was all spontaneous, not made to order. When

the Prince moves round, it is but meet that all those owing allegiance to the king should greet the royal visitor.

nāraṇaṉ tamaraik kaṇṭu ukantu, nal nīr mukil
pūraṇa poṉ kuṭam pūrittatu, uyar viṇṇil;
nīr aṇi kaṭalkaḷ niṉṟu ārttaṉa; neṭu varait
tōraṇam niraittu eṅkum toḻutaṉar-ulakē. (X–9–2)

Translation

Up in the sky, the joyous clouds, laden with water fine,
Received with honour great, Lord Nārāyaṇa's votaries,
Presenting unto them gold vessels containing water,
With coconut laid on top, the deep waters of the oceans
Did standing ovation give while the denizens
Of all the worlds set up festive banners, long and tall.

Note

Not satisfied with mere roaring with joy, as set out in the last song, the clouds present the ceremonial 'Pūrṇa Kumba' (vessel containing water, having coconut as the lid) to the distinguished sojourners; likewise, the oceanic waves, that danced, keep on expressing their joy. The denizens of the upper worlds vie with each other in setting up mammoth banners and buntings for greeting the Lord's votaries, during their ascent to heaven.

toḻutaṉar-ulakarkaḷ tūpa nal malar maḻai
poḻivaṉar, pūmi aṉṟu aḷantavaṉ tamar muṉṉē:
eḻumiṉ eṉṟu, irumaruṅku icaittaṉar, muṉivarkaḷ—
vaḻi itu vaikuntarkku eṉṟu, vantu etirē. (X–9–3)

Translation

Unto the devotees of the Lord Who once spanned the worlds,
The denizens of the upper worlds did incense burn and showered
Flowers fine; the sages did their silence break and adored

These marchers to Heaven, welcoming them all the way; arrayed
On both sides, they did these dignitaries duly escort.

Note

There are certain upper worlds, charged with the special responsibility of guiding and conducting the released souls in their onward march to heaven. Those denizens are shown here as revering the new-comers by burning incense before them and showering on them choice flowers of outstanding fragrance. Even the sages came foward, breaking their normal vow of silence, to welcome these Heaven-bound souls and escort them.

etir etir imaiyavar iruppiṭam vakuttaṉar;
katiravar avar avar kainmirai kāṭṭiṉar;
atir kural muracaṅkaḷ alai kaṭal muḻakku otta—
matu viri tuḻāy muṭi mātavaṉ tamarkkē. (X–9–4)

Translation

The Celestials marched ahead of the devotees of Mātavaṉ
Who does on His crown wear honey-studded tuḻaci garland,
And put up inns to lodge *en route* these souls Heaven-bound;
The twelve Katiravars and other escorts took them along,
Showing things around, the drums they played, bellowing
Like the roaring of the seas with surging waves.

Notes

(i) The Devas in the upper regions, are said to manifest their great joy over the heavenly ascent of the devotees of Mādhava, by playing music, *en route*, and putting up nice halting camps in enchanting surroundings, where the distinguished marchers might possibly alight and relax themselves. Even if these special camps, studiously set up by the Devas in their eagerness to serve the Heaven-bound souls, are not eventually used by the latter, the former will have the immense satisfaction of having discharged their duty, in keeping with their essential nature. There is no element of exaggeration in this, as will be borne out by those

of us who are aware of the fact that pots of money are lavished on the face-lift of buildings and thoroughfares, which our top state-dignitaries are likely to pass through, just one after-noon. It has also turned out, in a few cases, that the V.I.P. for whose approbation or at least the avoidance of his or her displeasure, lakhs of rupees were spent overnight towards repairs and renovation of roads, erection of buntings and festoons, etc., *en route*, did not visit the place at all, due either to the cancellation of the proposed visit or last minute changes entailing the adoption of a different route altogether.

(ii) In his famous Īṭu Commentary, Nampiḷḷai deplores how these very Śrī Vaiṣṇvas, who are given such V.I.P. treatment by the denizens of the upper worlds, are, during their stay in this abode, despised and neglected by men over here. Well, the Śrī Vaiṣṇavas have nothing to worry. On the other hand, they shall rejoice if they were put down by those who hated them merely on the ground of their being the worshippers of Lord Viṣṇu, as the episode of Miḷakāḻvāṉ, already set out in the notes below III-5-5 and reproduced here as well, will show.

A certain Rājā, a rabid opponent of Vaiṣṇavism, built a number of houses for being gifted away to the poor. When Miḷakāḻvāṉ approached the Rājā for the grant of one of these houses to him, the Rājā flatly declined. When asked by the supplicant the grounds on which he was refused the hospitality, the Rājā made no secret of his aversion for Vaiṣṇavāites and broke out: "No doubt, You are worthy in other respects, but as a Śrī Vaiṣṇava and a disciple of Śrī Rāmānuja, You stand disqualified."

So great was Miḷakāḻvāṉ's love of his religion and his great preceptor that he exclaimed :

"Oh, is that so? I am mighty glad, you recognise me as a Vaiṣṇava, although I thought I was not worthy of being called one". So saying, he gathered up his

garment, threw it up in the air and danced in sheer joy. This goes to show that the frowns of men, over here, are of no consequence to those souls, consumed by the fire of divine love. Did not the unrelenting repulsion of Vibhīṣaṇa, as the family traitor by the irate Rāvaṇa, prove a great blessing to the former?

mātavaṉ tamar eṉṟu, vācalil vāṉavar
pōtumiṉ, ematu iṭam pukutuka eṉṟalum,
kītaṅkaḷ pātiṉar kiṉṉarar, keruṭarkaḷ-
vēta nal vāyavar veḷvi uḷmaṭuttē. (X-9-5)

Translation

The Celestials did in the outer space assemble and revere
The great marchers to Heaven, saying "Here they are,
The devotees of Mātavaṉ" and welcomed them to their places;
The Vedic scholars of the upper worlds did unto them release
And bestow the benefits earned by their rites and rituals,
While the Kinnaras and Karuṭas sang many a song.

Note

The Celestials came out into the open to greet the devotees of Lord Mādhava Who bears Śrī Mahālakṣmī on His chest, as the favourite wards of the Divine Mother. The distinguished marchers to Heaven were accorded a warm reception by the Celestials who invited the former to visit their places and accept their hospitality. The Vedic Scholars of the upper worlds deemed it a great privilege to bestow on these marchers, the benefits, accrued by dint of their own Vedic rites and rituals. The Kinnaras and Garuḍas, famous as singers in their respective lands, also sang songs to greet the great marchers. May be that the Heaven-bound 'Released souls', pining whole-heartedly for the attainment of the Lord in Heaven, are bereft of any kind of desire for such entertainments. Nevertheless, the denizens of the respective order in the upper regions, would at once deem it their great privilege and duty to entertain these distinguished men, passing along.

vēḷvi uḷmaṭuttaḷum, virai kamaḻ naṟum pukai,
kāḷaṅkaḷ, valampuri kaḷantu eṅkum icaittaṉar;
āḷmiṉkaḷ vāṉakam āḻiyāṉ tamar eṉṟu,
vāḷ oṇ kaṇ maṭantaiyar vāḻttiṉar-makiḻntē. (X–9–6)

Translation

The fruits of their Vedic rites the savants did offer,
The lovely smoke from the incense sweet spread all over;
Chanks and bugles sounded lustily, the damsels, bright-eyed,
Hailed the marchers, and unto them, in joyous accents, said,
"Ye, devotees of our Lord Who does the discus wield,
Sway over this country of ours may you hold."

Note

The bright-eyed 'Apsaras', the sweet damsels in the upper regions, cast their cool glances on the Lord's devotees, passing along; Overcome by spontaneous joy, these ladies welcomed the distinguished travellers with the same warmth with which the elders would greet the home-coming of an youngster who had strayed away in distant lands quite long. Nampiḷḷai would just melt down in ecstasy over the Lord's redemptive grace which elevates even the erstwhile sinners, steeped in vice, to such a commanding position as to be adored by the rank and file of those in the top-most order of eminence.

maṭantaiyar vāḻttalum, marutarum vacukkaḷum
toṭarntu eṅkum tōttiram colliṉar-toṭukaṭal
kiṭanta em kēcavaṉ, kiḷar oḷi maṇimuṭi
kuṭantai em kōvalaṉ kuṭi aṭiyārkkē. (X–9–7)

Translation

When the ladies sang the glory of these great marchers
Who did from generations serve Kēcavaṉ, our Sire,
Who did repose on the ocean unfathomable and now reclines
In Kuṭantai sporting the gleaming gem-set crown,

The 'Marutars' and 'Vacus' did their glory laud
And kept following them as far as they could.

Notes

(i) Not satisfied with what they did, in their respective areas, unto the distinguished marchers to Heaven, the 'Maruth Gaṇas' and 'Aṣṭa Vasus' went beyond their territorial limits, as far as they could, singing all the time the glory of these great souls on their upward journey. As a matter of fact, even these Devas, reputed for their rapid movements with immense speed, could not keep pace with the holy band on their heavenly ascent, as they were speeding fast towards the Lord in Heaven, Who would not brook separation from them, any longer.

(ii) The Heaven-bound Śrī Vaiṣṇavas are adored and revered by the people *en route*, as the hereditary vassals of the Lord, enshrined in Tirukkuṭantai (Kumbakōṇam in Tamil Nādu), the 'Insatiable Nectar'. So great was Nammāḻvār's fascination for this holy centre where the Lord reclines on the serpent-bed, out of loving condescension that he could not lift his mind off it, even at this crucial stage. Tirumaṅkai Āḻvār, who closely followed in the foot-steps of Nammāḻvār, also began and wound up his grand hymnals by referring to the holy Tirukkuṭantai.

kuṭi aṭiyār ivar kōvintaṉ taṉakku eṉṟu,
muṭi uṭai vāṉavar muṟai muṟai etirkoḷḷa,
koṭi aṇi neṭu matiḷ kōpuram kuṟukiṉar–
vaṭivu uṭai mātavaṉ vaikuntam pukavē. (X–9–8)

Translation

The crowned denizens of Heaven spared no pains
And came forward to welcome these devotees, from generations,
Of Lord Kōvintaṉ, when they did the main entrance gain

Of 'Vaikuntam', the abode of Mātavaṉ of form exquisite,
Bound by stately walls which lovely banners decorate.

Notes

(i) The 'Nityas', in Heaven, now come forward, in their strength, to greet the devotees from Earth, of Lord Govinda, who were enthralled by His amazing simplicity and loving condescension, during His advent on Earth. The venue where the two groups meet is just outside the main entrance to Heaven (Śrī Vaikuṇṭa). It may be noted that, while the previous song reflected the Lord's glory in His 'Arcā' (iconic) manifestation, this song highlights the Lord's trait of amazing simplicity, freely exhibited by Him during His 'Vibhava' (incarnate) state on Earth, the only place where this great trait of His could shine most.

(ii) The Lord (Śrīman Nārāyaṇa), 'Nityas' (Eternal Heroes) and 'Muktas' (Released Souls) are all decorated with crowns. But there is a difference; the Lord's crown betokens His sovereignty, His role as the Protector of one and all, while the crowns of others are their badges of śeṣatva (servanthood) or dedicated service unto the Lord.

(iii) The Heaven wears a festive look, with festoons and banners, hung across and lovely wall-decorations. Even the exceedingly charming Lord and the Divine Mother shine with special lustre, at the sight of these spiritually regenerated souls, reclaimed at long last. It is said that, when Vasudeva and Devakī saw Kṛṣṇa after Kamsa was slain, they looked years younger, overwhelmed with joy. King Daśaratha felt rejuvenated whenever he saw or thought of Rāma. Actually, the king gave expression to this sentiment, in the course of his lusty pleadings with the unrelenting Kaikeyi not to insist upon Rāma being sent into exile. (Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa II-12-103).

vaikuntam pukutalum, vācalil vāṉavar
vaikuntaṉ tamar emar, ematu iṭam pukuta eṉṟu
vaikuntattu amararum muṉivarum viyantaṉar–
vaikuntam pukuvatu maṇṇavar vitiyē. (X–9–9)

Translation

The eternal angels did in front of the gates of Heaven wait
And with joy immense greeted these marchers great,
Saying unto them, "May you, our masters, devotees of the Lord
Of Vaikunta take over our duties and our positions hold";
The Celestials, in the perpetual service of the Lord engaged,
And the sages, in meditation steeped, deemed it their privilege
That men from Earth should go all the way to Heaven.

Note

Tirumaṅkai Āḻvār was so steeped in the enjoyment of the Lord in His Arcā (Iconic) manifestation in the 'Līlā Vibhūthi' (Sportive Universe), easily worshipped in His image form of exquisite charm, that he even ridiculed the idea of men aspiring for Heaven, like unto the senseless pursuit after the flying crow, letting go the rabbit on hand. And so, there lies the special charm in this abode of ours. It is this aspect that made the denizens in Heaven wonder how the men from Earth did at all go over to Heaven and if they did, it was only due to the former's great, good fortune. While this is how the Celestials, engaged in the perpetual service of the Lord in that heavenly setting, and the sages, absorbed in the contemplation of His innumerable auspicious traits, reacted to the entry into Heaven of the new-comers, the 'Nityas', the Eternal Angels, holding key positions in the governance over there, invited the new-comers to take their places straightaway. For example, senāpathi, the Premier Chamberlain to the Lord, would hand over his baton, the symbol of his vast authority, a gracious gesture indeed! This was because the new-comers were looked upon, by them all, as their very masters, the hot-favourites, the vassals of Vaikunṭanātha (Lord of Heaven), in deep love with Him. These new-comers and

the denizens, already in Heaven, thrive alike on divine service and it is this very service that is being offered now by the latter to the former.

vitivakai pukuntaṉar eṉṟu nal vētiyar
patiyiṉil pāṅkiṉil pātaṅkaḷ kaḻuviṉar;
nitiyum, nalcuṇṇamum, niṟai kuṭa viḷakkamum
mati muka maṭantaiyar ēntiṉar-vantē. (X–9–10)

Translation

The eternal angels, by the sacred vedas adored, did deem
It their fortune great that these men have to Heaven come,
And so, they did receive them with honours great
And with due ceremonies washed their feet;
Came forward the damsels bright whose faces did like the moon shine,
In their pretty hands, they held the Lord's foot-rest fine,
The vermilion powder which is on the devotees' fore-heads worn,
Vessels, full of water with coconut lids, and lamps auspicious.

Notes

(i) The 'Nitya Sūrīs', the Eternal Angels, who never passed through the gruelling mill of Samsāra and are, therefore, known as 'aspriṣṭa Samsārīs', honour the 'Released Souls' just entering Heaven on such a grand scale, without the slightest tinge of superiority complex. What makes them admire the new entrants and honour them, by enthroning them and washing their feet, is the fact that these men come from the land of dark nescience, affording very little scope for God-love and yet they are steeped in selfless love of God, too deep for words, and thus have an edge over the 'Nityās' themselves. If the 'Nityās' are pure and uncontaminated, it is by-no-means surprising for there is hardly any risk of contamination in Heaven, where they have been all along. On the other hand, it is indeed praiseworthy that those on Earth, situated as they are, should ever be able to turn their attention

God-ward and, much less, love Him solely for His sake, with no strings attached.

(ii) The faces of the damsels in Heaven brighten up, all the more, due to sheer joy at the sight of these new-comers, like unto the jubilant mother, regaled by the home-coming of the way-ward son who had strayed, for long, in distant lands.

vantu avar etir koḷḷa, mā maṇi maṇṭapattu
antam il pēriṉpattu aṭiyarōṭu iruntamai
kontu alar poḻil kurukūrc caṭakōpaṉ col
cantaṅkaḷ āyirattu ivai vallār muṉivarē. (X–9–11)

Translation

Those that can recite these songs ten,
Out of the thousand Veda-oriented songs of Caṭakōpaṉ
Of Kurukūr, abounding in many a flower garden fine,
Recounting his enjoyment in Heaven of beatific bliss eternal,
In the company of the devotees great, in the gem-set hall,
Greeted by the Lord Supreme and the Divine Mother,
Will become sages, steeped in the Divine, for ever.

Notes

(i) This end-song sets out the benefit, accruing to the chanters of this decad, as being their elevation on a par with the sages in the high Heaven, immersed in incessant contemplation of the auspicious attributes of the Lord.

(ii) Oh, what a glorious ascent! How exciting, exhilarating and entertaining is this special Heaven-bound route, exclusively earmarked for the ardent devotees of Lord Mahāviṣṇu! And there, at the other end, what a glorious reception by the Celestials, *en masse*, headed by their Chief, the Lord Himself, accompanied by the Divine Mother! And then, sitting in the grand gem-set hall of Heaven, of incomparable excellence, in that august assembly, presided over by the Lord and the Divine Mother sharing His throne, is indeed the very acme of that inexhaustible bliss and beatitude.

Well, the Āḻvār has, at long last, achieved what he had pined for, all along, namely, the enjoyment of the Lord in Heaven, in the holy company of the great ones.

(iii) The Āḻvār has now entered the second stage, namely, 'Para Jñāna', in the ascending scale of God-love, which falls into the three distinct compartments of 'Para Bhakti', 'Para Jñāna' and 'Parama Bhakti'. The first of these three stages became pronounced when the Supreme Lord, with lotus eyes, got into the Āḻvār's eyes, (I-9-8) and thus blessed the Āḻvār with His glorious vision. This 'Para Bhakti' gathered momentum and got intensified to its farthest limit in X-8-7, where the Āḻvār referred to the Lord's continuous stay in his full view, for his eyes to feast upon. The intensity of divine love, surging within, is such that it seeks to break its bounds and launch into external perception and enjoyment of the Lord, the grand vision, outstripping the narrow limits of mental comprehension (Darśana). And now, this glorious darśan, given expression to, by the Āḻvār, by way of referring to his blissful participation in the grand galaxy of the 'Nityas' and 'Muktas' in Heaven, the eternal land of inexhaustible bliss, marks the second stage of his God-love, namely 'Para Jñāna', in full swing (vide aphorisms 230 and 231 of Ācārya Hṛdayam).

(iv) *The bliss eternal*: The eternal land (Heaven) is the abode of unalloyed bliss interminable, the diametrically opposite of Earth, the harrowing abode of endless misery and nothing but that. The so-called enjoyment, resorted to and indulged in, by the folks over here is nothing but misery under the cloak of enjoyment, pain in the garb of pleasure. When King Pāṇḍu aimed an arrow at a deer, the dying deer exclaimed: "A Ṛṣi that I am, my wife and I could snatch just a little time for sexual enjoyment and we disguised ourselves as deers, for this purpose. And this rare moment, one in a thousand, alas! You didn't allow us to avail of. So, this is life!"

Tenth Centum—Tenth Decad (X-10)
(Muṉiyē! nāṉmukaṉē!)

Preamble

It was indeed a rude jolt to the Āḻvār, who was shocked into a sense of stark reality, when he opened his eyes and found that he was still seated where he was, namely, the hollow inside the trunk of the tamarind tree, in the precincts of Lord Ādinātha's temple in Āḻvār Tirunakari. It now transpired to him that his ascent to heaven, through the exhilarating 'Arcirādi mārga', the honours lavished on him by the various agencies all along the route and at the destination, his stay in the midst of the 'Nityās' and 'Muktās' in the gem-set hall, where the Lord and His Divine Consort were holding Durbar, all these, expatiated on by him in the preceding decad, were but the figments of his imagination, a mere mental comprehension and nothing more. Eaten up by the cruel pangs of frustration at that he is still lingering in the unenviable mesh of 'Prakṛti' (matter), the Āḻvār now cries out his heart unto the Lord, in a manner that is bound to melt even those utterly devoid of tenderness of heart. Oh, what a pity! the Lord, who is fully aware of the Āḻvār's utter helplessness and sole dependence on Him, has chosen to keep him still tethered to the material body. Like unto the suckling, tormented by deep thirst and pinching hunger, despite the parents being near at hand, crying out lustily, the Āḻvār calls out the Lord. Voicing forth his deep yearning with the utmost effort, like the full-throated call for relief from one engulfed by wild fire, the Āḻvār compels the immediate attention and succour of the Lord. It would indeed be well-nigh impossible for the Lord, at this stage, to stick to His seat in Heaven anymore, without responding to the ardent call of a devotee of the calibre of Nammāḻvār.

Weighed down by a gnawing sense of guilt, the merciful Lord, of remarkable tenderness of heart, felt even more depressed than the Āḻvār himself. And so, the Lord and His Divine Consort rushed down, mounted on Garuḍa, flying at supersonic speed. The Lord cut out the Āḻvār's material contacts *in toto* and led him to the transcendental sanctum (Śrī Vaikuṇṭa). And there, in the high Heaven, the ultimate destination of the yearning soul, the Āḻvār entered the august gathering of the great devotees of Lord

Vaikuntanāthaṉ and mingled freely with them, the joyous intercourse with this holy band in the exalted land, pined for by him since long, thus becoming an accomplished fact. According to the Āḻvār's own admission, in this decad, vide stanza 10, the Lord's love for him outgrew his own and made it dwindle down to naught. The Āḻvār's love for the Lord progressed by stages, as one can perceive, going through the entire gamut of this grand hymnal and currently, it has attained its full stature (Parama Bhakti), outstripping all else, assuming supra-cosmic proportions, even to the extent of enveloping the Lord Himself. The Lord, however, forestalled the Āḻvār, enveloped his 'avā' (deep love) and thereby held him in His sweet embrace. In the concluding stanza of this decad, which is also the grand finale of this great hymnal, the Āḻvār gives vent to his sense of completion and fulfilment, saying that he has reached the ultimate destination, all the impediments having been eradicated, root and branch.

The Supreme Lord, Śrīman Nārāyaṇa is the Subject sung about in this hymnal which, in the Āḻvār's own words, is styled as 'avāvil antāti', a species of prosody, charged with 'Bhakti', in which the closing word of each song is the opening word of the next one. Saint Śaṭhakopa, the Lord's own poet, endowed by Him with divine knowledge, full and perfect, clear and concise, is the grand author of this glorious hymnal. The Āḻvār's advent in this world was indeed on a par with that of the Lord, both being due to the great, good fortune of the meritorious 'sādhus', the devout, immersed in incessant contemplation of the divine.

muṉiyē ! nāṉmukaṉē ! mukkaṇ-appā! eṉ pollāk
kaṉivāyt tāmaraik kaṇ karu māṇikkamē! eṉ kaḷvā !
taṉiyēṉ ār uyirē! eṉ talaimicaiyāy vantiṭṭu,
iṉi nāṉ pōkal oṭṭēṉ-oṉṟum māyam ceyyēl eṉṉaiyē.
(X–10–1)

Translation

Oh, Lord of fruit-like reddish lips and lotus eyes, You are the sage,
Contemplating the ways of creation; Internal Controller of all, You stay
Inside the four-headed Brahmā and Rudra, the triple-eyed; Your Form exquisite,

Like virgin sapphire, You did unto me exhibit
And covertly won me over, dear unto me exclusively like life,
You have on my head alighted and I shan't let You go off;
Play not your wily pranks on me, in love with you, so deep.

Notes

(i) The Āḻvār pleads lustily that the Lord should no longer keep him in bondage, after having spontaneously induced in him God-love and God-hunger of this magnitude. The Lord is addressed, in this song, as the Sage (Muni), Who contemplates and conceives the projects pertaining to the creation of the Universe, its sustenance and dissolution and gets the work of creation and dissolution, discharged by Brahmā and Rudra respectively, permeating their souls as the Internal Controller. There is absolutely no question of parity among Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Rudra and, at any rate, the Āḻvār would be the last person to think in terms of such parity and, much less, throw the slightest hint or suggestion to this effect, seeing that he has already expounded indubitably the supremacy of Lord Viṣṇu, in I-1, II-2 and IV-10. If the Lord has been addressed in this song (as per the original text) as, "Oh, four-headed Brahmā," "Oh, triple-eyed Rudrā," it only connotes the body-soul relationship of the Lord and His subjects, the entire Universe and all beings therein constituting, as it were, His bodies, Himself pervading them all, as the Inner Controller, the Super Soul, c.f. also VI-9-1 where the Āḻvār has referred to the Lord as pervading the five elements, Sun and Moon, Śiva and Brahmā, as the Inner Controller of them all.

(ii) The Lord's 'Viśvarūpa' (Universal Form) apart, the Āḻvār dotes on His unique Form (Divya Maṅgala Vigraha) of exquisite charm. It is by exhibiting this enchanting Form that the Lord enticed the Āḻvār and made him God-bent, a great gesture of spontaneous grace, bestowed on the Āḻvār, unasked and unsolicited, at a time when he was least inclined towards

God. And now, the Āḻvār, so transformed, cannot subsist without Him and he will have nothing to do with the worldlings either, in whose wretched company he was wallowing all along. He would, therefore, be neither here nor there, if the Lord too gave him up, after having kindled in him God-love of such astounding proportions that he is seen to possess.

(iii) "*I shan't let You go off*": "Ofcourse, *not at this stage*, when You have weaned me away from my erstwhile plight as a 'Samsāri', earth-bound and sense-buried and, on the top of such reclamation, made me partake of the supreme bliss of intimate intercourse with you. Well, you have also been pleased to bring within my comprehension the heavenly bliss and the exhilarating route leading to Heaven. You shall not give me up, any more." The Āḻvār thus compels and binds the Lord, by reason of his inordinate longing for Him and His inescapable obligation to redeem him. c.f. Bharatā's behaviour in Citrakūṭ, in an all-out effort to induce Śrī Rāma to curtail his exile and go back to Ayodhyā, to take over the reins of the kingdom.

māyam ceyyēl eṉṉai; uṉ tiru mārvattu mālai naṅkai
vācam cey pūṅ kuḻalāḷ tiru āṇai; niṉ aṇaikaṇṭāy;
nēcam ceytu uṉṉōṭu eṉṉai uyir vēṟu iṉṟi oṉṟākavē
kūcam ceyyātu koṇṭāy; eṉṉaik kūvik koḷḷāy vantu, antō !
(X–10–2)

Translation

On oath do I put Your Consort Divine,
That perfect lady whose locks emit fragrance fine,
Like unto the garland You do on Your lovely chest don;
I put You also on oath, You did court me on Your own
And mingled with me freely as if You and I were one;
Play You shan't Your wily pranks on me any more
But call me up to Your lovely feet, delaying no more.

Note

There was no immediate response to the Āḻvār's call, as in the last song. And so, he repeats that the Lord should not side-track him and keep him in bondage, as hitherto, on one pretext or another. The Āḻvār's yearning is so deep that he even binds the Lord and His consort, the Divine Mother, irresistibly upon oath, to fulfil his longing, too deep for words. When the Lord turned round and called the Āḻvār's attention to the impropriety of his binding Him on oath, cutting at the root his essential nature of total dependence on Him as His exclusive vassal, the Āḻvār justifies his stance quite well: The Lord mingled freely with him and loved him even more than His Consort, Mahālakṣmi, completely identifying Himself with him. The up-surge of love unto Him, thus generated in the Āḻvār, grew intense beyond words and it was the exuberance of this love that induced the Āḻvār to move to such incredible lengths for sheer survival through speedy restoration to Him.

kūvik koḷḷāy vantu, antō!-eṉ pollāk karumāṇikkamē !
āvikku ōr paṟṟukkompu niṉ alāl, aṟikiṉṟilēṉ yāṉ;
mēvit toḻum piramaṉ civaṉ, intiraṉ ātikku ellām
nāvik kamala mutal-kiḻaṅkē! umpar anta atuvē! (X–10–3)

Translation

Oh, my Lord, sweet like virgin sapphire, from Your navel did sprout
The lotus stalk that gave rise to Piramaṉ and thro' him,
Civaṉ, Intiraṉ and all else, Who are unto you devout,
And there are the exalted Celestials in Heaven and unto them
Very dear You are; prop unto my life I see not
Any but You. May You, alas! call me up to Your lotus feet.

Notes

(i) Like unto the thirsty who cry out, "water! water!", the Āḻvār, who is God-thirsty, repeats his call for the Lord's succour. Notwithstanding the exuberance of his love for God, it is hardly meet that he should rush unto Him on his own, nor would it redound to the credit of the Lord, if the Āḻvār did so. Therefore it is, the Āḻvār insists that the Lord should come and take him

on to the heavenly abode. Of course, the Lord could take His own time and lift the Āḷvār up, in due course and there would have been no question of the Āḷvār being so importunate, urging for quick consummation in the manner he is now doing, if only the Lord had not exhibited to the Āḷvār His intoxicating beauty and His immaculate Form of exquisite charm and sent the Āḷvār mad with love unto Him. Even as a creeper needs a prop to nestle around for its very growth and subsistence, the Āḷvār seeks to cuddle round the Lord for sheer survival. Did not Lakṣmaṇa tell Rāma, "neither I nor Sītā can subsist, when apart from You"? 'naca Sītā tvayāhinā........ "—Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa, II-53-31.

(ii) When the Lord turned round and queried whether the Āḷvār had any merit in him, commensurate with the gain aspired for by him, the Āḷvār pointed out that even Brahmā and other Celestials, in the higher echelons, were totally dependent on His grace for whatever they wished to accomplish and that the Lord should not, therefore, expect or look for any merit in him. Actually, the Āḷvār is one better than that exalted band, as the latter would not even acknowledge and declare, as the Āḷvār does, that there is no prop for them other than the Lord.

umpar am taṉ pāḻē ! ō ! ataṉuḷmicai nīyē ō !
amparam, nal cōti ! ataṉuḷ piramaṉ, araṉ, nī;
umparum yātavarum paṭaitta muṉivaṉ-avaṉ nī;
emparam cātikkaluṟṟu, eṉṉaip pōra viṭṭiṭṭāyē. (X-10-4)

Translation

My Lord, You are the Controller great of one and all,
The primordial matter and the myriads of souls lodged therein,
The spatial ether, the radiant fire and other elements as well,
The cosmic egg which holds Piramaṉ, Araṉ and others within,
The sage You are, Who did create the Devas, the humans
And the other species, keeping in mind their past actions;

To salve me You did come forward, on Your own
But still you do keep me here, lingering on.

Notes

(i) In a vacant piece of land one can raise any crop according to one's predilection, and so, in the vast vacant land of Primordial Matter (Mūla Prakṛti) can be sown multifarious seeds, yielding a vast variety of crops of enjoyment as well as emancipation, that either bind the souls, the tenants tilling the soil, or work up to their release from such bondage.

(ii) Unto the Lord, the Universal Controller, the Matter, the elements emanating therefrom, the different species of beings inhabiting the created worlds with their colourful varieties, all these constitute, as it were, His bodies, and He is the Super-Soul, pervading them all.

(iii) So far as the Āḷvār is concerned, he is fully aware, against the background, set forth above, that the Lord is very keen to salve him and yet, he is indeed puzzled why he is still kept on, in this abode. "Does it not smack of indifference on Your part?" the Āḷvār is now asking the Lord.

pōra viṭṭiṭṭu eṉṉai nī puram pōkkaluṟṟāl, piṉṉai yāṉ
āraik koṇṭu ettai? antō! eṉatu eṉpatu eṉ? yāṉ eṉpatu eṉ?
tīra irumpu uṇṭa nīr-atu pōla, eṉ ār uyirai
ārap paruka, eṉakku ārā-amutu āṉāyē ! (X-10-5)

Translation

You are unto me the nectar insatiable,
That does fully quench my God-thirst abnormal,
Like the red-hot iron having its fill, jolly well,
When dipped in water and yet if You , my Lord,
Gave me up and kept me aside, [in sensual pleasures buried,]

What can this frail being achieve and by what means?
Alas! what am I and what is mine?

Notes

(i) The Āḻvār deplores his sad plight; he feels that he has been woefully despised by the Lord, despite His role as the great Universal Protector and His omni-potence, reducing him to the unenviable predicament in which he finds himself nowhere. Neglected by the Lord, the Āḻvār betrays his utter helplessness, neither he nor any one else can help him. And so, he feels done up.

(ii) Even as the red-hot iron, dipped in water, drinks all that water, needed to cool it down effectively, the Lord exhibited His exquisite charm to the Āḻvār, so as to entice his soul and consume it, in full.

eṉakku ārā-amutāy, eṉatu āviyai, iṉ uyirai,
maṉakku ārāmai maṉṉi, uṇṭiṭṭāy; iṉi uṇṭoḻiyāy–
puṉak kāyā niṟatta, puṇṭarīkak kaṇ, ceṅkaṉivāy,
uṉakku ēṟkum kōla malarppāvaikku aṉpā ! eṉ aṉpēyō !
(X–10–6

Translation

Oh, Lord of lily hue, lotus eyes and reddish lips beautiful!
Dear unto the lotus-born Divine Mother, matching You so well,
Unto me You are love incarnate, the nectar insatiable,
You did consume alike my material body and soul delectable
And still feel that You didn't have Your heart's fill,
You have perforce to consume what remains of me still.

Notes

(i) If the Lord loved His Consort, Mahālakṣmī intensely, He was the very personification of love unto the Āḻvār. That being the case, the Āḻvār rightly points out to the Lord that He can ill-afford to despise him now.

(ii) Unlike the nectar that was once churned from the Milk-ocean and distributed to the Devas, the Āḻvār enjoys the Lord's nectarean charm, in an ever increasing measure, it being ever fesh and inexhaustible. What a grand setting indeed! The lotus-born Mahālakṣmī, a perfect match unto the Lord of exquisite charm, of the complexion of the lily in fresh bloom, the eyes resembling the red lotus flower, just blossomed, and the lips, radiant like the red fruit. The Divine Mother is "Bhagavan Nārāyaṇa abhimatānurūpa", as stated by Śrī Rāmānuja in the opening line of 'Śaraṇāgathi Gadya'. She is both 'Abhimatha' (dear) and 'Anurūpa' (a good match) unto Lord Nārāyaṇa.

(iii) The Lord's fascination for the Āḻvār did not stop with his soul but extended to his physical body, as well. Even so, there was no satiety for Him and seeing this, the Āḻvār would urge Him to go the whole hog out and consume him, in full, without throwing him out, half way through.

kōla malarppāvaikku aṉpu ākiya eṉ aṉpēyō!
nīla varai iraṇṭu piṟai kavvi nimirntatu oppa,
kōla varākam oṉṟāy nilam kōṭṭiṭaik koṇṭa entāy!
nīlak kaṭal kaṭaintāy !–uṉṉaip peṟṟu, iṉip pōkkuvaṉō?
(X–10–7)

Translation

Loved am I by You, Oh, Lord, as the one dear
Unto Your Consort, Lakṣmi, the lotus-born;
You did pull the Earth out, on Your tusks, oh, Sire,
As the blissful Boar unique, like a sapphire mountain
Rising up, gripping two Moons,; the ocean blue You did churn,
Once having gained You, shall I now let you slip down?

Notes

(i) It is a simple, yet irresistible argument, advanced by the Āḻvār. He said: "My Lord, what a mighty exploit You undertook, assuming the form of a great boar with gigantic tusks, protruding miles long, for reclaiming Mother Earth from the deep waters of the deluge! Again, You did churn the very ocean for

getting at my other Mother, Mahālakṣmī, the lotus-born. They are exceedingly dear to You and likewise, I am dear unto them. Therefore it is, You are dear to me and it was no mean effort on Your part to get at me, sunk deep in the ocean of Samsāra, a mighty effort, comparable with your aforesaid exploits. Once bound to You, in this manner, I am indeed very secure; neither You can shake me off nor I can let you slip off".

(ii) *The Lord's advent as the Blissful Boar*: In Tiruviruttam, the first of the four hymnals of the Āḷvār, he banks upon the grace of 'Varāha Mūrthi', the Lord's incarnation as the Blissful Boar and ends up by reinforcing this point. It is but appropriate that he should revert to this, as he concludes 'Tiruvāymoḷi', the last of his hymnals. The Earth having got submerged under the deep waters of the great deluge, the Lord pulled it out on His tusks; and here is a grand poetic imagery. The Lord, in the form of the magnificent Boar, with two protruding tusks gleaming white, rising from beneath the waters, picking up Mother Earth, is compared to a sapphire mountain rising up, gripping two Moons. While the Lord is compared to a Sapphire mountain and His two white protruding tusks are compared to two Moons, there is no mention of the Earth mounted on the Lord's teeth, as it just faded out of sight in that moon-shine (the gleaming tusks).

(iii) *Churning the blue ocean*: No doubt, it was the Milk-ocean that was churned but it is referred to, by the Āḷvār, as the blue ocean, due to the blue shade cast on it by the Lord of bluish hue. c.f. śloka 45 of Śrī Parāśara Bhaṭṭar's "Śrī Raṅgarāja Sthavam" (ap'paṇipathi bhāvāth......) wherein the illustrious author describes the dome (vimāna), just above the Sanctum Sanctorum where Lord Raṅganātha reposes on serpent-bed. Although the dome is white, symbolising, as it does, Ādi-Śeṣa of white complexion, yet it gleams splendidly, says the author, like the blue sea, because of the upward dispersal of the rays of bluish tint from the Lord's resplendent form of sapphire hue, down below.

peṟṟu iṉip pōkkuvaṉō uṉṉai, eṉ taṉip pēruyirai ?
uṟṟa iruviṉai āy, uyir āy, payaṉ āyavai āy,
muṟṟa im mūvulakum perum tūṟu āy, tūṟṟil pukku
muṟṟak karantu oḷittāy! eṉ mutaḷ taṉi vittēyō ! (X-10-8)

Translation

You are the Architect of acts good and bad, the souls indulge,
You are also the Inner Controller of the souls steeped in bondage;
Pleasure and pain, for acts good and bad, You deal out,
The Three worlds, the dense bush of Samsāra, You did create,
None can see You but yet the bush dense You permeate;
The Redeemer great, You did in me kindle love for You,
My Prop unique You are, how indeed can I leave You?

Notes

(i) "How can the body outlive the soul, supporting it from within?" queries the Āḷvār. If, at the moment, the Āḷvār is soaked in God-love and he looks upon God as his Sole Sustainer, it is due entirely to the special efforts made by the Lord since long, directed towards the Āḷvār's redemption. When the Āḷvār declares that he cannot let go the Lord, after having been united to Him so intimately, he means to say that he shall not subsist without Him and his very survival is, therefore, contingent upon his union with Him.

(ii) The main purpose of this song would appear to be to bring home to the Lord that He is all in all, the Great Redeemer and Sole Sustainer of all beings and that He should not, therefore, look for any merit, as such, in the Āḷvār, to compel His attention and warrant the influx of His grace.

mutal taṉi vittēyō, mu'u mūvulaku ātikku ellām !
mutal taṉi uṉṉai, uṉṉai eṉai nāḷ vantu kūṭuvaṉ-nāṉ
mutal taṉi aṅkum iṅkum muḻu muṟṟuṟu vāḻ pāḻāy,
mutal taṉi cūḻntu, akaṉṟu, āḻntu, uyarnta muṭivili ! ō !

(X–10–9)

Translation

Oh, Lord, You are the triple cause that did usher
The worlds three and all things therein; You pervade all over,
Things and beings, one and all, You control the primordial matter,
As the Primate unique; the sentient beings eternal that enter
The material habitat and direct, with their pervasive power of intelligence,
You ordain; the Causeless Cause unique! to behold the effulgence
Of Your Form unique in Heaven, when do I Your feet attain?

Notes

(i) Transforming Himself, as He does, into the worlds of forms and names, the Lord is the *Material* Cause of the Universe, just like clay for pot, cotton for cloth and so on. The Lord is also the *instrumental cause* like potter for the pots, weaver for the cloth etc. When the period of the great 'Pralaya' (deluge) draws to its close, the Lord, at His sweet volition and 'Saṅkalpa', the wishful thinking, "May I become manifold!", separates into its constituent elements, the whole mass of the enjoying souls and their objects of enjoyment, remembering distinctly the constitution of the worlds prior to 'praḷaya'. The Lord is, therefore, the *operative cause* as well, His jñāna (knowledge), Śakti (power) etc., being analogous to the potter's wheel and staff, the weaver's woof, bobbins, treadle etc. By His transformation into the world of men and matter is meant His immanence, as the Internal Controller of all, revealing the underlying unity of Brahman, qualified by the sentient beings and non-sentient things. He is thus the 'Viśesya', the substance present in all things, qualified by the

'Viśeṣaṇa' or attributes, namely, the sentient beings and non-sentient things. Whatever exists remains what it is, only because of His conjunction and so, 'Cit' (what perceives—the sentient being) and 'Acit' (what does not perceive—the non-sentient matter) constitute, as it were, the body of Brahman, who is the Super-Soul, pervading all over, things and beings, one and all.

(ii) While one can conceive, with respect to the external world of men and matter, the universal aspect of God-head, the Lord's Viśvarūpa or Universal Form, the phenomenon behind the phenomenal world (the one behind the many, the hidden power behind the visible world of objects), the Āḻvārs, on their part, cannot remain content with a mere notional realisation of the Lord, as the all-pervading Force. They all pine for the Lord's special Form, extra-ordinary indeed, His effulgent Form in the high Heaven, like a mount of emerald with sinewy arms, shoulders four, silken robes, the dazzling crown proclaiming His overlordship, lotus eyes, coral lips and so on, in the sweet company of His Divine Consort (Mahālakṣmī), surrounded by millions of 'Muktas' (Released Souls) and 'Nityas' (Ever free), in constant attendance on the Divine Couple. c.f. IV-9-10.

cūḻntu, akaṉṟu, āḻntu, uyarnta muṭivil perum pāḻē! ō!
cūḻntu, ataṉil periya para nal malarc cōti! ō !
cūḻntu, ataṉil periya cuṭar ñāṉa iṉpamē! ō !
cūḻntu, ataṉil periya eṉ avā aṟac cūḻntāyē. (X–10–10)

Translation

The eternal matter that sprawls along, high and low, up and around,
The individual souls whose native intelligence does matter pervade and transcend,
You permeate them all, Oh, Lord, with Your blissful intelligence and sweet will,

My flamboyant appetite that did engulf all these three Principles,
You did appease, in full, enclosing me in Your sweet embrace.

Notes

It was the exuberance of the Āḻvār's love unto God that egged him on to the extreme length of binding Him upon oath, in the name of His Consort, Śrī Mahālakṣmi, vide second song of this decad. The Lord could not but respond immediately to the ardent call of the Āḻvār, saturated with God-love. And so, He did hasten to the devotee and held him in tight embrace. This was the only way the Lord could avoid being engulfed by the Āḻvār's love for Him, which had, by now, developed to such an enormous extent like whirlwind that it assumed supra-cosmic proportions, transcending all the three entities or principles, namely, matter (Acit), soul (Cit, the Jīva) and Īśvara (the Supreme Lord, the Inner Controller of one and all, the great Ordainer). Finding that the Lord had forestalled him and proved more than a match for him by shedding on him His love, far more intense than even his own, and thus setting him at rest, the Āḻvār gratefully acknowledges the Lord's great gesture.

It is quite an ordinary principle, amply borne out by our everyday experience, that our longing for a particular object, however intense, ceases simultaneously with its fulfilment. In other words, the moment the object of our heart is achieved, the yearning therefor is set at naught—" Iccāyā viṣaya siddhyā nāśaḥ ". For example, the thirst is quenched by drinking water and hunger vanishes when one is fed. And so, one way of interpreting this song would be, that the Āḻvār's longing for the Lord, deep and intense beyond words though, ceased when he attained Him. There is yet another interpretation, far more interesting, rather, edifying. It is not as if the Āḻvār's love, which had gathered momentum down the years, had been set at naught altogether but it dwindled down to negligible proportions, when compared with the Lord's astounding love for him, as revealed in the finale of this great saga of Divine Love.

The Āḻvār's love, which was fast encompassing all the three Principles like the forest fire of menacing proportions, pales into insignificance, having regard to the magnitude and intensity of the love now exhibited to him by the Lord, which is comparable to Śrī Rāma's patronising and parental love to Bharata, on their reunion at the end of the long exile. Bharata was lifted by Rama unto his lap and held in sweet embrace, like unto the fond father fondling the child, restored to him after years of separation.

avā aṟac cūḻ ariyai, ayaṉai araṉai alaṟṟi,
avā aṟṟu, vīṭu peṟṟa kurukūrc caṭakōpaṉ coṉṉa
avā il antātikaḷāl ivai āyiramum muṭinta
avā il antāti ip pattu aṟintār piṟantār-uyarntē. (X-10-11)

Translation

Exalted among those born are they, well-versed in these songs ten,
Out of the thousand skilfully composed by Kurukūr Caṭakōpaṉ,
Which mark the finale, the great consummation
Of this God-love, too deep for words, his blissful union
With Ari, the Redeemer great, the Internal Controller
Of Ayaṉ and Araṉ, called out by him with remarkable ardour.

Notes

(i) And now, we have come to the very end of this prolific hymnal, with its scintillating profusion of God-love (Bhakti) in the ascending scale of 'Para Bhakti', 'Para jñāna', and 'Parama Bhakti'. Well, 'Para Bhakti' is confined to the four corners of mental experience and exhilaration, whetted by the alternation of delirious enjoyment of blissful rapport with the Lord (Samśleṣa) and bottom-most depths of dejection, desolation and despondency, due to the temporary withdrawal of the glorious vision of the Lord from the mind's canvas (Viśleṣa). The Āḻvār was in this first stage only, right up to the end of the eighth decad of this centum. The next stage of 'Para jñāna' is denoted

by the devotee's love unto God, overflowing its erstwhile continent of mere mental comprehension, with an irresistible urge for external perception of the divine, in the manner longed for by the devotee; this stage was attained by the Āḷvār only in the preceding decad (X-9). And here, in this decad, we see the Āḷvār in the final stage, known as 'Parama Bhakti', the culmination, rather, consummation of his 'Para Bhakti', when he just cannot exist without the attainment of the glorious end in view, as set out by him in the ninth song of this decad (see the 2nd sub para of the notes thereunder). The Tamil phraseology, "Muṭinta avā", in the original text of this song, is the exact equivalent of 'Parama Bhakti'. As usual, this end-song also sets out the benefit accruing to the chanters of this decad, namely, they will be deemed by the devout, plunged in divine consciousness, as on a par with the denizens in Heaven, the 'Nityas' and 'Muktas', though born in this land of dark nescience. Only the materially-minded worldlings, earth-bound and sense-buried will look upon these chanters as mere fellow-travellers.

(ii) In I-4-6, where the Āḷvār (Paraṅkuśa Nāyakī) sent some birds as her emissaries to the Lord in a fit of desperation, she referred to the Lord as 'aruḷāta nīr' (You, Who wouldn't shed your grace). Well, that was long, long ago, in the early stages of evolution of the Āḷvār's God-love. And now, the same Lord is referred to, by the same Āḷvār as 'Avāvaraccūḻ Ari' (Hari, the great Deliverer whose all-conquering love has encompassed his own love for Him, of ultra-cosmic magnitude and made it dwindle down to naught and thus pale into insignificance). The Āḷvār called out the Lord lustily, addressing Him not only as 'Hari' but also as 'Haran' and 'Ayan', the last two denoting, *prima facie*, Śiva and Brahmā, respectively, but actually, referring to the Supreme Lord, Mahā Viṣṇu, the In-Dweller, the internal Controller of Śiva, Brahmā and all else in the entire Universe, including the high

Heaven. As a matter of fact, the Āḷvār has thus provided the clue to the proper appreciation of the Upaniṣadic texts, such as, "Sarvaṁ Kalvidhaṁ Brahmā", "Ayidhatātmayaṁ idhaṁ sarvaṁ" etc., against the background of "Śarīra Śarīri bhāva", body-soul relationship, dealt with, *in extenso*, in the foregoing notes, at the appropriate places).

(iii) Crying out unto the Lord lustily, soaked in God-love, the Āḷvār got all his erstwhile impediments, ills and evils, the outcome of the accumulated mass of his age-long sins, eradicated, root and branch, by the devastating love shed on him by the Supreme Lord and attained Him in that Eternal Land of endless bliss, the Lord Himself being the inexhaustible fountain source of all that bliss. The thousand and odd songs, comprised in this grand hymnal, flowed like a fountain from the love-laden heart of the Saint, the rapturous outpourings, *par excellence*, by-no-means comparable to the poetry of the mundane poets whose chief aim is to amass wealth and power, acquire name and fame, prostituting their poetic talents, in the ignominious process. As a matter of fact, there have been umpteen poets after the Āḷvār and their poems, one and all, are no more than the bellowing of the roaring sea, as compared to this hymnal (Tiruvāymoḷi) of the Āḷvār, whose songs were dictated by his God-love galore. Figuratively speaking, his God-love was the great teacher who made the Āḷvār reel out these thousand and odd songs, one after the other in succession, neatly juxtaposed.

In his inimitable diction, Aḻakiya Maṇavāḷa Perumāḷ Nāyaṉār describes, in aphorism 188 of 'Ācārya Hṛdayam', how Tiruvāymoḷi, this grand hymnal came into being. The knowledge, full and complete, clear and concise, imparted to the Āḷvār by the Lord Himself (See I-1-1), blossomed by His sweet grace into 'Para Bhakti' (intellectual love of God) which, in turn, developed into 'Para Jnāna' and 'Parama

Bhakti' in the ascending order, as set out in the foregoing notes. So then, the Āḻvār can be likened to a lake, full of water, which successively turned into milk (Para Bhakti), ghee (Para Jñāna) and nectar (Parama Bhakti) and ultimately burst and inundated the outlying area, all around, the bund being unable to contain the upsurge and bombardment of its precious contents. And yet, there is this difference between the lake proper and the Āḻvār, figuratively referred to as the lake. Whereas the lake that breached would cause havoc to the adjoining roads, trees, villages and townships falling within the scope of the mischief of the gushing waters, the Āḻvār-lake, about to burst, was compassionate enough to prevent a similar devastation of the area around. These thousand and odd songs flowed through the lips of the Āḻvār, forming, as it were, the lake-bund. Into these songs, facile words and sweet phrases, competing with each other for participation in the glorious service unto mankind, at large, as intended by the Lord, slipped, as it were, into their proper places, according to the Āḻvār's own admission. Thus, it was the nectarean love for God, welling up the Āḻvār's bosom, that overflowed its continent into these rapturous songs, numbering more than one thousand, the great treasure of divine love. It was not as if the Āḻvār sat in a quiet corner and composed these songs, with a set determination to do so. But it was the upsurge of his devotion unto God, which forced him, as it were, to deliver these songs (Avāvilantāti).

THE CENTUM IN RETROSPECT (DECAD-WISE SUMMARY)

(X-1) : With the clear awareness that the day of his promised ascent to heaven was near at hand, the Āḻvār set about preparing for his onward journey. Finding the Lord in His worshippable Form at Tirumōkūr, as the super-abundant Benefactor with profound knowledge and prowess, capable of steering through all obstacles on the way, the Āḻvār got hold of Him, as the unfailing Escort, during his onward march to the yonder Heaven. Apart from the Lord's attainments, His bewitching beauty is enough to make the Āḻvār follow Him, enjoying His exquisite Form, all along. Such a Lord is lauded by the Āḻvār, *in the opening decad of this centum*, through appropriate songs, set in choice diction;

(X-2) : *In the second decad*, the Āḻvār sings the glory of the Lord, enshrined at Tiruvanantapuram (Kerala State) and longs for the felicity of divine service unto the Lord. As we go on, we will find the Āḻvār calling successively at the holy centres of Tiruvāṭṭāṟu, Tirumāliruñcōlai, Tiruppēr and adoring the Lord, enshrined in those places. Having been assured of his ascent to Heaven, at the end of the current span of life, vide IX-10-5, Saint Nammāḻvār quite well knew that the day of his ascent was near at hand. That is why, he has actively embarked on a programme of leave-taking;

(X-3) : The Āḻvār's aspiration for divine service at Tiruvanantapuram as in the preceding decad, did not materialise. So deep was his sense of frustration that it led him to suspect the frightful possibility of the Lord prolonging his stay in this abode. *In the third decad*, the Āḻvār, however, expresses his apprehension in an indirect way, cloaking his own misgivings by referring to those entertained by the shepherdesses of Bṛndāvana. These damsels started nagging Kṛṣṇa, the naughty cow-herd boy, even in the early hours of the morning, the pre-dawn period. The cool breeze is blowing, the koels have started cooing, the peacocks are strutting about and the herds of cows and calves are seen spread out, all over the place. So great is Kṛṣṇa's loving care for the cattle that He would surely follow and tend them, relegating to the background His concern for the Gopis who cannot, however, brook separation from Him even for a short while. Greatly agitated over the certainty of His departure from their midst on this particular morning also, as usual, they start experiencing the pangs of separation, even when He is still by their side. One of them would lustily plead with Him that He shall not leave them and go out into the fields, firstly, because they cannot bear being apart from Him for a whole day which actually looms like ages in their aching minds, and secondly, because of the lurking danger to His life, at the hands of Kamsa's evil spies and agents, who keep on masquerading in one form or another, all over the place. This decad, however, ends on a jubilant note, with a sense of clarity induced by the Lord's assurance to the Gopis that He shall not depart from their midst. The Āḻvār's misgivings also stand cleared up, a clarity induced by the Lord Himself.

(If our eminent preceptors referred to IX-9, as 'Evening brawl', they did label this *decad as* "Morning squabble").

(X-4) ; His erstwhile fears having been quelled, the jubilant Āḻvār gets busy in giving the finishing touches appropriate to this grand hymnal of unparalleled sweetness and grandeur. *In the fourth decad*, the Āḻvār sets out the benefits accruing to those pursuing the path of loving devotion unto the Lord besides recounting the benefits showered on him by the Lord, how the Lord contrived to get Himself lodged firmly in the Āḻvār's heart, how complacent He feels after reaching that coveted destination and so on.

(X-5) : Overwhelmingly conscious of the almost immediate prospect of his ascent to Heaven, the Āḻvār tenders his parting advice to the world *in the fifth decad*, the very last in the series of lectures delivered by him for the edification and elevation of the earth-bound, sense-buried men of the world. In this swan-song of the Āḻvār, he calls upon the worldly men to chant Lord Nārāyaṇa's holy names and serve Him, in conjunction with Mahalakṣmī, the Divine Mother, by word (singing), deed (offering choice flowers) and thought (loving meditation).

(X-6) : *In the sixth decad*, the Saint highlights the speed with which the Lord wishes to take him to the heavenly abode. Whereas the Āḻvār was hitherto seeking out the Lord and pursuing Him doggedly, the Lord is now in hot pursuit of the Āḻvār. In the exuberance of His love for the Āḻvār, the Lord would even think in terms of lifting him bodily to Heaven and seek the Saint's permission therefor. How amazing and how incredible that the Sovereign Lord should seek the Āḻvār's permission and want to play the subordinate role! Not finding any one else with whom the Āḻvār could share this wonderful experience of his, he opens up a dialogue with his own God-bent mind and gives vent to his hearty appreciation of the Lord's tender solicitude and amazing simplicity, in this decad.

(X-7) : From his present vantage position, the Āḻvār could prevail upon the Lord to give up His over-ambitious project of lifting the former up to Heaven, with this very body made up of the elements, the 'prākṛtik' nest. That the sovereign Lord should desist from putting through His cherished desire, purely in deference to the Āḻvār's injunction, excites the Āḻvār's admiration of the Lord's amazing simplicity and tender solicitude, all the more. Literally lost in the contemplation of these extra-ordinary traits of the Lord, the Āḻvār could regain his normal composure only after quite some time. Therefore it is, the Āḻvār warns like-minded poets, steeped in the enjoyment of the Lord's auspicious traits, not to get involved in these enthralling traits of the Lord but just skip over them lest they should also get bogged down, as he did. The Lord, who exhibited such a great predilection for the Āḻvār's physical frame, is depicted, *in the seventh decad*, as the One enshrined in Tirumāliruñcōlai (Tamiḻ Nāḍu). The Lord is said to have lavished on the Āḻvār's material body, the aggregate of the love, borne by Him for the sacred centres of front-rank eminence like Mount Tirumāliruñcōlai, Mount Tiruvēṅkaṭam, the Milk-*ocean and* Sri Vaikuṇṭa, the High Heavens.

(X-8) : With the stage, now well-set for his Heaven-bound journey, the Āḻvār accosts the Lord and seeks His explanation for His age-long indifference, allowing him to drift so long in this land of dark nescience, in dire contrast to His present hurry to put him in Heaven. The Āḻvār, however, quickly realises that the present dispensation of the Lord is but the influx of His spontaneous grace, totally unrelated to the merit in him. It is this voluntary grace of the Lord that the Āḻvār dwells upon, *in the eighth decad*, and rejoices.

(X-9) : The Lord should have felt embarrassed by the rather inconvenient question put to Him by the Āḻvār, in the preceding decad. He, therefore, tried skilfully to tide over this unenviable situation, by bringing within the Āḻvār's mental comprehension the entire panorama of his ascent to Heaven. The clouds and the oceans roared like an orchestra, heralding the Āḻvār's ascent to Heaven and the inhabitants of all the seven islands, bestowed on him their choicest offerings. The sweet music and the fanfare of trumpets etc., from the land of the kinnaras, Gandharvas and Garuḍas in the upper regions, hailing the Āḻvār's ascent to Heaven, were made to fall on his ears; the chanks and bugles sounded all over, beautiful damsels with spear-shaped eyes sang in chorus the Āḻvār's glory. The Maruth Gaṇas and Aṣṭa vasus kept chanting the laudatory hymns continually. The upward journey to Heaven through the exhilarating route, known as Arcirādi Gati, the propitiation of the Āḻvār by the Angels, *en route*, the Āḻvār's entry into Heaven and the grand ovation accorded to him by the denizens on the yonder side, his access to the gem-set hall, where Lord Mahāviṣṇu holds His ceremonial Durbar, duly conducted by the guides nominated for the purpose, and attainment of the Lord's feet, all these were experienced mentally by the Āḻvār and voiced forth by him, *in the penultimate decad*, in an impersonal manner. He just depicts how, as a class, the devotees of the Supreme Lord, Śrīman Nārāyaṇa are on their ascent to Heaven through this exalted route, exclusively ear-marked for them, greeted all along the route and received with special honours by the denizens of the upper regions, showering praises on the new-comers, so on and so forth.

(X-10) : It was indeed a rude jolt to the Āḻvār, who was shocked into a sense of stark reality, when he opened his eyes and found that all that exhilarating experience, expatiated on, by him in the preceding decad, was a mere mental comprehension and nothing more. Eaten up by the cruel pangs of frustration at that he is still lingering in the unenviable mesh of 'prakṛti' (matter), the Āḻvār voices forth his deep yearning with the utmost effort, like the full-throated call for relief from one engulfed by wild fire. Weighed down by a gnawing sense of guilt, the merciful Lord of remarkable tenderness of heart, felt even more depressed than the Āḻvār himself. And so, the Lord and His Divine Consort rushed down, mounted on Garuḍa, flying at supersonic speed. The Lord cut out the Āḻvār's material contacts, *in toto*, and led him to the transcendental abode (Śrī vaikuṇṭam). There, in the high Heaven, the ultimate destination of the yearning soul, the Āḻvār entered the august gathering of the great devotees of Lord Vaikuṇṭanātha and mingled freely with them, the joyous intercourse with the holy band in that exalted land, pined for by him since long, thus becoming an accomplished fact. According to the Āḻvār's own admission in the penultimate song of *this concluding decad*, the Lord's

love for him outgrew his own and made it dwindle down to naught. The Āḻvār's love progressed, by stages, as one can perceive, going through the entire gamut of this grand hymnal and currently, it has attained its full stature (Parama Bhakti), outstripping all else, assuming supra-cosmic proportions, even to the extent of enveloping the Lord Himself. The Lord, however, forestalled the Āḻvār, enveloped his 'avā' (deep love) and thereby held him, in His sweet embrace. In the concluding stanza of this decad, which is also the grand finale of this great hymnal, the Āḻvār gives vent to his sense of completion and fulfilment, saying that he has reached the ultimate destination, all the impediments having been eradicated, root and branch. Thus ends the 'Avāvilantāti', a special species of prosody, charged with 'Bhakti', in which the closing word of each song is the opening word of the next one.

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APPENDIX

(The 'Ubhaya Vedānta' concept in Śrī Vaiṣṇavism)

1. 'Ubhaya Vedānta'—the two Vedāntas:

The two Vedāntas, which are like unto a pair of eyes, are the Saṁskṛt and the Draviḍian (Tamil) texts, respectively. The Saṁskṛt Vedas are better known than the Draviḍian counterpart and the generality of us are at least aware of the existence of the former, even if they have not been studied, as such, and much less, delved into. For resolving the doubts and difficulties, which might arise in the interpretation of the 'Karma-Kāṇḍa' of the Saṁskṛt Veda, dealing with the rites and rituals, in propitiation of 'Brahman' (God), Sage Jaimini brought out a work, known as 'Pūrva Mīmāṁsā Śāstra'. Likewise, Sage Vyāsa produced the '*Śārīraka* Mīmāṁsā' *alias* 'Uttara mīmāṁsā Śāstra', as an aid to the proper understanding of the 'Brahma Kāṇḍa' (Upaniṣads) expatiating on the glory of 'Brahman'. It is this glossary, that is commonly referred to, as the 'Brahma Sūtra' or 'Bādarāyaṇa Sūtra'. The elucidation, furnished in the 'Brahma Sūtras', is indispensable to the Vedāntins who aspire for a proper appreciation and understanding of the Supreme Reality, the final goal and the infallible means of attaining it, as set out in the 'Upaniṣads'. In fact, only those, well-versed in the 'Brahma Sūtras', are known as 'Vedāntins' or Brahma Jñānis'. In order to bring the cardinal principles and tenets, embedded in these Sūtras, within the fair grasp of all, the three great exponents of the Vedic religion, Śrī (Ādi) Śaṅkarācārya, Śrī Rāmānujācārya and Śrī Ānanda Tīrtha (Madhvācārya) with Advaitik, Viśiṣṭādvaitik and Dvaitik approach respectively, have brought out their own commentaries of the 'Brahma Sūtra'.

It is noteworthy that, unlike the names given to the commentaries of others viz. Śaṅkara Bhāṣya, Madhva Bhāṣya, Nīlakaṇṭa Bhāṣya and so on, the commentary of Śrī Rāmānuja is known as 'Śrī Bhāṣya'. To the Śrīvaiṣṇavites, that is to say, the Viśiṣṭādvitins, who are the followers of 'Śrī Rāmānuja, 'Śrī Bhāṣya' is the great sustainer. It would be significant to mention, at this stage, that it has evoked the admiration of even Western Philosophers of the calibre of Prof. Maxmuller, Dr. Thibaut etc. Extracted below is the mature verdict of Prof. Maxmuller, resulting from years of dedicated deliberations, set forth in his very last work, "The six systems of Indian Philosophy—Page 245."

"We ought, therefore, to look on Rāmānuja as a perfect equal of Śaṅkara, so far as his right of interpreting Bādarāyaṇa's Sūtras, according to his opinion, is concerned. It is the same here, as everywhere, in Hindu Philosophy. The Individual philosopher is but the mouthpiece of tradition and that tradition goes further and further, the more we try to fix it chronologically. While Śaṅkara's system is Advaita '(i.e.), absolute monism, that of Rāmānuja has been called Viśiṣṭādvaita, the doctrine of unity with attributes or monism with a difference. Of course, with Rāmānuja also, Brahman is the highest reality, Omni-potent, Omni-Scient, but this Brahman is, at the same time, full of compassion or love. *This is a new and very important feature* in Rāmānuja's Brahman, as compared with the icy self-sufficiency, ascribed to Brahman by Śaṅkara.

Even more important and more humanising is the recognition that souls, as individuals, possess reality, that ' Cit ' and ' Acit ', what perceives and what does not perceive, soul and matter, forming, as it were, the body of Brahman, are, in fact, modes (Prākāra) of Brahman ".

The portion italicized in the above extract, namely, " This is a new and very important feature ", has to be taken to mean that this feature of Vedānta had failed to receive proper treatment at the hands of the earlier monistic philosophers and it was left to Śrī Rāmānuja to expound it. Indeed, the doctrine of a loving God is as old as the Vedas. Not to cite many passages, one alone from the Ṛig-Veda (ix-32-5), (Yoṣājāramivapṛyaṁ), avers that love between God and souls is as fervid as between a lover and his beloved. As a matter of fact, Sage Bodhāyana compiled a copious guide to the ' Brahma Sūtra '. It was reproduced by sages Taṅka, Dramiḍa, Guhadeva and others, in a condensed form. Śrī Rāmānuja set unto himself the task of bringing out his commentary (Śrī Bhāṣya) along the lines adopted by these Ṛsis. While this is not the place to expatiate on the greatness and grandeur of ' Śrī Bhāṣya ', it would be quite pertinent to point out that Śrī Rāmānuja, as the propounder of the Viśiṣṭādvaitik method of interpreting the Vedānta Sūtras, was largely inspired by the intuitive experiences and mystic utterances of that great Sage-poet Śathakopa, better known as Saint Nammāḷvār. One might wonder how, of all the commentators, Śrī Rāmānuja alone was able to go through the entire gamut of the *Śrutis* and get hold of the relevant ' *Ghaṭaka Śrutis* ', the cementing texts, such as ' *yasya ātmā Śarīram* ', ' *Yasya pṛtivi Śarīram* ', ' *ya ātmani thiṣṭan* ', synthesising the various seemingly conflicting texts, the ' *abedha Śrutis* ', suggestive of the existence of no more than that single entity—' *Brahman* ' and the ' *bedha Śrutis* ', high-lighting the difference between *Brahman*, the Supreme Lord, on the one hand and the Sentient and non-sentient beings, on the other. It is indeed unique, the aura of judgement with which he has wound up each one of his commentaries on the Vedānta Sūtras, declaring, ' Itisarvaṁ samañjasaṁ ', that is, everything has thus been reconciled. It may be mentioned, in passing that those other systems of philosophic thought, which are either alien to the Vedas and heretical or are distorted interpretations of the vedic texts, have also been duly refuted by Śrī Rāmānuja, in his ' Śrī Bhāṣya '.

2. It was not as if the ' *Ghaṭaka* ' or the cementing texts, bridging the gulf between the ' *abedha* ' and ' *bedha* ' śrutis and reconciling them, were not already there for other commentators to see but it can be safely asserted that Śrī Rāmānuja's special attention was drawn to them by Saint Nammāḷvār, right at the commencement of Tiruvāymoḷi. In the very first decad of the first centum of this scintillating hymnal, the Saint has admirably conveyed the contents of the ' *ghaṭaka Śruti* ' in the compact Tamil expression, ' Uṭalmicai Uyireṉa'. This conveys the truth that God permeates everything like unto the soul permeating the body, the body-soul relationship (Śarīra Śarīri bhāva), which is the key to Viśiṣṭādvaita philosophy. Later on, the Saint expands this idea by referring to God as the ghee remaining latent in the fresh-drawn milk, so on and so forth. As a matter of fact, this body-soul relationship, already dealt with in śubālopaniṣad and Antaryāmi Brāhmaṇa etc., was expounded by Nammāḷvār, in more than twenty stanzas of Tiruvāymoḷi. Śrī Rāmānuja's Brahman (God) was the one

postulated, rather revealed and revelled in, by all the love-intoxicated Saints that went before him, the monarch of whom was Saint Nammāḷvār—a God, full of compassion and a host of other auspicious traits, the repository of all conceivable excellence, immeasurable and unlimited, in dire contrast to the icy-cold, abstract God, formless and colourless, conceived by Śrī Śaṅkara. In Tiruvāymoḷi, the opening line itself throws open the flood-gate of the mystic vision of the Lord, conceived as the abode of inexhaustible bliss, that cuts out all fatigue. Actually, the glorious impact of the ' *Dramiḍa Vedānta* ', the ' *Divya Prabandham* ' on Ācārya Rāmānuja, particularly, Saint Nammāḷvār's Tiruvāymoḷi (for which there is a peerless commentary, known as Īṭu muppattārāyiram), has to be dealt with separately and, *in extenso*. And now, let us pass on to the other Vedānta, the Drāmiḍa Vedānta.

3. *Drāmiḍa Vedānta*: (i) The love-laden hymns of the Āḷvārs, the mystics, soaked in God-love, are collectively known as ' *Divya Prabandham* ', rightly accorded a stature equal to that of the Saṁskṛt Vedas and, in a sense, even superior to them. The Drāmiḍa Vedānta has an edge over its Saṁskṛt counterpart, by virtue of the former's clear and straightforward exposition of the Vedic truths, shorn of all quibblings and equivocation. Extending the comparison a little further, it may be pointed out that the Āḷvārs occupied a unique position to which the Vedic Ṛsis could make no pretensions. Unlike the Ṛsis, who had to attain to a standard of near perfection through their own efforts and personal equipment, the Āḷvārs were blessed with a full and complete knowledge of God-head and the Śāstras in all their ramifications, by a self-revealing God, the fountain-head of all knowledge and hence the superior excellence of their Songs Divine. The four thousand hymns of these seer-poets constitute a veritable treasure of divine knowledge, full of light, love, beauty, harmony and bliss. All the Vaiṣṇavas sing in chorus these inspired songs which flowed from the sacred lips of the Āḷvārs, at home and in the temples, in all worships, ceremonies and rituals, and none can fail to feel the thrill of divine presence, wherever they are sung. Śrī Vedānta Deśika, the great Vaiṣṇava Ācārya, a veritable lion among poets and logicians, has gratefully acknowledged, in the opening stanza of his ' Adhikāra Saṅgraha ', the unfailing help and guidance received by him from the *Divya Prabandham*; he exlaims that these inspired hymns have resolved all doubts by shedding adequate light on the moot points, the dark corners, the by-lanes and slippery spots in the Saṁskṛt Vedas. Two works of this literary giant, entitled ' Dramiḍopaniṣad Sāram ' and ' Dramiḍopaniṣad Tātparya Ratnāvali ' purvey to the scholars of the Saṁskṛt-knowing world the salient teachings of Nammāḷvār, keeping them all spell-bound.

(ii) The Sweet-sounding hymns of the ' *Divya Prabandham* ' are couched in the seemingly simple Tamil language and yet, they would not have yielded their real contents to the lay public, but for the great commentators-the versatile stalwarts of the calibre of Periyavāccān Piḷḷai, acclaimed as the prince among commentators, Vaṭakku Tiruvitipiḷḷai of cryptic memory, who could faithfully reproduce, *in extenso*, the elaborate discourses of Nampiḷḷai on ' *Tiruvāymoḷi* ' and others. But then, these commentaries, copious and illuminating though, are in what is known as ' *maṇipravāḷa* ' style, an admixture of Tamil and Saṁskṛt, besides being replete with quotations from several other works, the Saṁskṛt

Vedas, the Śāstras, the *Itihāsas*, *Purāṇas* etc., not to mention the peculiarities of the dialect, current in those good olden days. For a proper appreciation of these commentaries and deriving the maximum benefit, all by oneself, one has to possess the requisite equipment or, alternatively, study at the feet of great and competent scholars for quite some years. This is hardly possible for most of us in the modern age, notorious for its stress and strain, the old order of things, particularly, the traditional course of instructions in those pristine environments having been replaced by modern Schools and Colleges.

(iii) At this stage, it seems necessary to eliminate even that little bit of risk namely, contamination of public thinking in regard to the exalted status of the hymns of the Āḻvārs, which enjoy parity with the Saṁskṛt Vedas and the stature of the Āḻvārs themselves. The expression 'Āḻvār' means one who has taken a deep plunge into the nectarean ocean of the Lord's innumerable auspicious attributes and His great glory. Being over-whelmed by an insatiate longing for incessant communion with God, the Āḻvārs not only remained immersed in such devout contemplation but literally got dissolved in the Lord, like milk, honey, sugar-candy and porridge. Śri Vaiṣṇava tradition has fixed the number of the Āḻvārs, once for all, as twelve, since their peerless devotion is deemed unapproachable by ordinary, bound souls, however exalted be their illumination and purity. It is held that they are the eternal, ever-free angels in Heaven, very near and dear to the Lord who once, at His behest, came down in human form, to demonstrate, both by precept and example, the nature of true devotion to the benighted and erring mortals below. Fifth in the chronological order, in which the Āḻvār Saints are said to have made their appearance in this abode of ours, came Māṟaṉ, later known as Śaṭhakopa (the one who overcame the mischief of the ill-wind, known as 'Śaṭha', in Saṁskṛt parlance, that deals a deadly blow to the babe just emerging from the mother's womb and makes it forget its past life) and Saint Nammāḻvār. Born of parents who were mere peasants, at the beginning of the current spell of kaliyuga, deep south in Tamil Nādu (Kurukūr, also known as Āḻvār Tirunakari), Māṟaṉ became a problem child unto his parents who had fervently prayed to Lord Viṣṇu for progeny. The child would not drink even the mother's breast-milk when offered, would not speak, would sit, if seated, stand, if made to stand on the legs, lie down, if put to bed and, in short, it made no movement on its own. In sheer despair, the parents took the child to the local temple of Lord Ādinātha, deposited it on the floor and prayed to the Lord, their eyes remaining closed, rapt in meditation. But, when they opened their eyes, they did not find the child. To their utter surprise, they discovered the child, seated in a lotus posture (Padmāsana) inside the hollow of a tamarind tree in the quadrangle of the temple, absorbed in yogic meditation. The young Saint is said to have remained in the same posture for thirty two years, meditating on Lord Viṣṇu and communing with Him, prior to his ascent to the Lord's lotus feet in Heaven.

An elderly brahmin (later known as Madhurakavi Āḻvār), also born near Kurukūr, the birth place of Nammāḻvār, who was sojourning in Northern India, witnessed one day the unusual phenomenon of a resplendent sun in the southern horizon. Struck by great wonder, the Elder moved, on and on, towards this unprecedented source of rare brilliance and eventually reached his destination,

namely, the tamarind tree in the temple at Āḻvār Tirunakari. Coming face to face with the juvenile Saint, sitting motionless inside the hollow of the tree, almost insensate, the perseverent visitor wished to know whether the youngster was at all alive. When queried by the new-comer, "Sire ! if the little one is born in the womb of the dead (inert) matter, what will the former feed on and where will it lie?", pat came the answer from the Saint, equally cryptic, "that it will eat and there it will lie," signifying that the 'Jīva' (individual soul, sub-atomic in size) imbedded in inert matter, will partake of the characteristics of matter and literally get lost in it. Realising that he had, at long last, got hold of the master, the spiritual mentor he was in search of, the Elder stayed on, listening to the rapturous out-pourings from the love-laden heart of the Saint and swearing undivided allegiance to him, relegating even God to a secondary place. This is borne out by the sweet-tongued Elder's own hymn of remarkable fervour (11 verses), captioned "Kaṇṇinuṇ Ciruttāmpu". History has it that at a time when the four thousand hymns of the Āḻvārs had faded out of existence, Śrīman Nāthamuni (10th Century) propitiated, by dint of his yogic powers, Saint Nammāḻvār, right in front of the holy tamarind tree inside the temple at Āḻvārtirunakari, by reciting the aforesaid eleven verses of Madhurakavi Āḻvār, in adoration of the great master, as many as twelve thousand times. As a result of this yoga, Nammāḻvār appeared before Śrīman Nāthamuni and recited the four thousand hymns composed by all the Āḻvārs put together. Having collected these hymns in this extraordinary manner, Śrīman Nāthamuni handed them down to posterity, in an unbroken succession down to this day, vide 'Guruparamparā prabhāvam-6,000 granthas' as well as 'Guruparamparā Sāram' of Śrī Vedānta Deśikar. It was, in this very context, that Nammāḻvār came to be extolled as the Chief of the clan of 'Prapannas' and looked upon as the figurative embodiment, within himself, of all the Āḻvārs, he being the body and the other Āḻvārs, the limbs thereof. His hymns are regarded as having the sanctity of the Vedas, being on a par with the Saṁskṛit Vedas, while those of the other Āḻvārs are treated as the 'Vedāṅgas' (ancillaries). No doubt, all the Āḻvārs were imbued with divine fervour of a very high order, having taken a deep plunge into the oceanic bliss of God-love. And yet, it has to be conceded that, for sheer philosophical profundity and mystic fervour, Nammāḻvār stands apart from the other Āḻvārs, on a pedestal of his own. Śrī Parāśara Bhaṭṭar, who flourished in the Vaiṣṇavite firmament nearly nine hundred years ago, has referred, in his laudatory hymns, known as 'Śrī Raṅgarāja Stava', to the Icons (idols) of Nammāḻvār and the other Āḻvārs, enshrined in one part of the spacious temple in Śrīraṅgam. As already stated, Sri Ramanuja made admirable use of 'Tiruvāymoḻi' and looked upon it as a sure and certain guide in resolving many an abstruse point while writing out his commentary (Śrī Bhāṣya) on the Brahma Sūtras. Therefore it is that he issued a mandate, as it were, in the last of his nine works, namely, the '*Nitya Grantha*' depicting the daily routine to be followed by the devout, that recital of the hymns of Āḻvārs, sweet to hear, (*Śrutismkhaiḥ*, in Saṁskṛt, and *Cevikkiniya Ceñcol*, in Tamil) should form an integral part of the daily worship which would otherwise be fruitless and insipid. That great savant, Śrī Āḷavantār, (Yāmuna) of vast and unfathomable learning, looked upon Nammāḻvār, as 'All in-one', the sum-total of all happiness, derived through earthly relations and riches, in just the same way as the Āḻvār

comprehended the Supreme Lord. And then, none can fail to notice the enormous depth of devotion of Kūrattāḷvān, the illustrious father of Parāśara Bhaṭṭar and a disciple very close to Śrī Rāmānuja. In Āḷvāṉ's Saṁskṛt hymns, the manner in which he adores Nammāḷvār, every now and then, is unique.

(iv) *The foster-mother*: Śrī Rāmānuja has been acclaimed by his contemporaries, as the foster-mother, who nourished the 'Divya Prabandham' with the utmost zeal and devotion. The invocatory stanzas, which are recited before chanting 'Tiruvāymoḷi' and 'Periya Tirumoḷi', the grand apocalypse of Tirumaṅkai Āḷvār, echo this sentiment and even go to the extent of praying unto Śrī Rāmānuja to grant the votaries the requisite strength of memory for retaining, in their minds, the hymns of the Āḷvārs. Indeed, this redounds to the credit and glory of Śrī Rāmānuja, who spared no pains to ensure the intensive and systematic propagation of the hymns in the various pilgrim centres, dissemination of their inner (esoteric) meanings through elaborate commentaries and so on. But for Śrī Rāmānuja's unremitting zeal and attention, in this direction, the 'Divya Prabandhas' might have been, once again, confined to the limbo of oblivion, as did happen in the days before Śrīman Nāthamuni.

(v) **Oh, what a spell!**

For the proper sustenance and nourishment of God-love, the 'Divya Prabandham' of the Āḷvārs stands right on top. Even the mere text, let alone the meaning thereof, makes enchanting reading, and those, who follow the meaning also and delve into it, are bound to get themselves transported to the region of ecstasy. No wonder, therefore, our Pūrvacāryas—Śrīman Nāthamuni, Yāmuna, Rāmānuja, Kūrattāḷvān, Parāśara Bhaṭṭar and other great scholars had an abiding interest in, and marked partiality for the hymns of the Āḷvārs, despite their own profound learning in the Saṁskṛt vedas and virtual mastery over all the Śāstras. It is always up to us to freely partake of the sumptuous repast, served to us by these great preceptors, by dint of their delving deep into the oceanic depths of not only the Saṁskṛt Vedas but also the Dramiḍa Vedas. It is worth recalling in this connection the emotional upsurge and rapturous delight of a North Indian disciple, on his initiation into the beauty of beauties, which 'Tiruvāymoḷi' undoubtedly is. Śrī Sudarśanācārya Śāstri, a staunch disciple of the famous (late) Govardhanam Raṅgācāriyār Swāmi, the founder of Rangji Mandir at Vṛndāvan (uttara pradesh), studied 'Bhagavad Viṣayaṁ', the commentary on 'Tiruvāymoḷi', at the feet of the master. The entraptured disciple gave vent to his reactions through ten Saṁskṛt ślokas, the gist of which is given below:

"Of the numerous Śāstras, extant in this world, none is comparable to the excellence of the 'Divya Prabandams' of the Āḷvārs. Those, who have written Commentaries for these hymns of the Āḷvārs, are the real 'Brahma-Jñānis'. Only those, who are endowed with the capacity to drink deep of this insatiable nectar-the hymns of the Āḷvārs and the illuminating Commentaries thereof—can justify their existence as well-merited. Oh, what a pity! Tamil is not my mother tongue, born as I was in this part of the country. I, however, revel in the thought that I have been fortunate enough to listen to these marvellous

discourses of the Swāmiji, unravelling this priceless treasure. Oh, Lord Śrīman Nārāyaṇa, as one who has taken refuge at the feet of the Govardhanam Swāmi, I have not the slightest doubt about my attaining 'Mokṣa' at the end of the current span of life. And yet, oh, Lord, I entreat you, with all the fervour at my command, taking your feet firmly in my hands, that you shall not grant me 'Mokṣa', at the end of this life of mine. Pray, let me be reborn in that part of the country, where Tamil is the regional language, the country which reverberates with the sweetness emanating from the hymns of the Āḷvārs, so that I may acquire a complete mastery over all the four thousand stanzas and be openly acclaimed as an 'Adhyāpaka' (Master) of the four thousand hymns. Let me sing these songs all the time, to my heart's fill, not only in one birth but in a number of births, say, seven or eight more, before reaching my ultimate destination. If, however, you grant me 'Mokṣa' right now, I will surely get back to Earth, setting at naught the upaniṣadic text 'Nacapunarāvartate' and also the Brahma Sūtra,' Anāvṛtti Śabdāt', which declare that the High Heavens form the Eternal Land whence there is no returning and those who have reached this ultimate destination are not reborn elsewhere (the dreadful cycle of birth and rebirth grinding to a halt). Yes, I will scrap all these edicts and take rebirth either on the banks of the river Tāmraparṇi (the birth place of Nammāḷvār) or the river Kāvēri or near about Śrīperumputūr (the birth place of Śrī Rāmānuja, the Chief fountain of inspiration for the study of Divya Prabandhas)".

4. Praise heaped on Divya Prabandhas by the Saṁskṛt Vedas and Purāṇas

The Vedic texts have, in several places, proclaimed the glory of 'Tiruvāymoḷi'. In the first *praśna* of '*Kāṭhaka*' portion of '*Taittirīya Upaniṣad*', which is quite familiar to the students of the Veda, comes the episode of Indra disabusing Bharadwāja of the possibility of the latter mastering the Vedas, even if his span of life were extended beyond the tenure of three hundred years already granted to him. The episode ends up with the greatly disappointed Bharadwāja ultimately attaining salvation through a study of Tiruvāymoḷi, taught to him by Indra. In other words, this is the episode of Bharadwāja's initiation into 'Savitur Vidyā', as Tiruvāymoḷi is otherwise known. Śrīman Nāthamuni, in his yogic comprehension of Saint Nammāḷvār, rightly saw the 'Savita' (Sun) in him and extolled him as "Yadgosahasram apahanti..... ", meaning:

I bow, in salutation to him, the Bakula-flowered (narcissus) Nammāḷvār, the Sun beaming through the thousand rays of Tiruvāymoḷi, which dispel darkness prevailing among people, where Lord Śrīman Nārāyaṇa resides, wielding His discus and conch and surrounded by His entire retinue, the region adored by the Brahmins, learned in the Śrutis, the cynosure of the Celestials". As already elucidated, it was this extra-ordinary Sun, the 'Vakulabhūṣaṇa Bhāskara' (Saint Nammāḷvār), deep down in the South, whose effulgence attracted the elderly Madhura Kavi, the sweet-tongued poet, who was touring in the far North.

In the 'Ṛk', "Sahasra Paramām Devī" of 'Taittirīya Upaniṣad', 'Devī' stands for praise (Stuthi) which the Veda is. 'Devī' is derived from the root

' Div ', which has several meanings, of which ' Praise ' is the principal one. The word ' Durva ', which stands in close proximity, means " the green one ". Indeed, the Dramiḍa Prabandhas are green and juicy. Invocation of ' Durva Devī ' can only refer to the ' Divya Prabandhas ', a fact which is further reinforced by the phraselogy, ' Sahasra Parama ', referring to the thousand pācurams (stanzas) of ' Tiruvāymoḻi ' c.f. ' Sahasra Śākhām Yodhrākṣith Drāmiḍīm Brahma Samhithām ' of Srī Parāśara Bhaṭṭar (Śloka 6 of the first centum of Śrī Rangarāja Stavam). Even as ' Puruṣa Sūktha ' is pre-eminent among Vedas, ' Tiruvāymoḻi ' stands foremost among the ' Divya Prabandhas '. Even as the Saṁskṛt Vedas have several roots, the Dramiḍa Vedas have also their roots-the ' Sahasra Śākhā ', each stanza of Tiruvāymoḻi being treated as a Śākhā. The expression, ' adhrākṣith ' means dissemination of the ' Dramiḍopaniṣad ' by Śaṭhakopamuni, even as the Saṁskṛt Upaniṣads were disseminated through certain Ṛsis. ' Vedebhya Svāḥ ', occurring in the Seventh Kāṇḍa, fifth praśna, is immediately followed by ' Gadhābhya Svāḥ ', which, according to Śrī Vedānta Deśikar, refers to the ' Divya Prabandhas '. He has actually used the word ' gadhā ', treating it as a synonym of ' Divya Prabandhas ', in his ' Dramiḍopaniṣad Tātparya Ratnāvali '.

5. Nampiḷḷai, the greatest discourser of all times on Saint Nammāḻvār's Tiruvāymoḻi, said as follows, while commenting on the last stanza of the illustrious work: " Hundreds of thousands of poets have, no doubt, come into this world after Nammāḻvār and yet, brushing aside their performance as nothing better than the roaring of the sea, if people stick to the hymns of Nammāḻvār, with rapturous delight, it is because of the upsurge of devotion, overflowing its continent through hymns of unparalleled sweetness. " This being the case, one just need not be bothered as to when these works came down to us and when the Āḻvārs lived. The Divya Prabandhas are held in rapturous esteem, not only by the entire hierarchy of the ancient Vaiṣṇava Ācāryas but also by the Celestials in the upper regions, as could be seen from the Indra-Bharadwāja episode, narrated earlier. The advent of the Āḻvārs had been alluded to by the Maharṣis in the ' Purāṇas '. Among the Saṁskṛt Purāṇas, Śrī Bhāgavatam is held in great esteem and reverentially recited by all alike—the Smārthas, Mādhvas and Vaiṣṇavas. Śloka 38 and the following Ślokas of Chapter V of the XI Skandham portend the appearance even in Kaliyuga, of Bhaktas who would look upon God Śrīman Nārāyaṇa, both as the ' Means ' and the ' End ', on the banks of the sacred rivers, namely, Tāmraparṇi, Pālār, Kāverī, Gṛtamālā and Prathīci. It is well-known that the ten Āḻvārs were born on the banks of these rivers. The first three Āḻvārs (Poikai, Pēy and Pūtattāḻvār) and Tirumaḻicai Āḻvār appeared in the Pālār region; Nammāḻvār and Madhurakavi Āḻvār were born on the banks of the river Tāmraparṇi, Periyāḻvār and Śrī Āṇḍāl, near Gṛtamālā; Toṇṭaraṭippoṭi, Tiruppāṇaṉ and Tirumaṅkai Āḻvārs, in the Kāverī Region, while ' Prathīci ', the Western river is said to flow near the birth place of Kulacēkara Āḻvār. Without undue prevarication, by way of discovering the date of the Maharṣi who foretold the on-coming of the Āḻvārs, it would suffice, for the purpose of the present work, to state that the great Bhaktas, whose coming down to Earth was thus visualised by the Maharṣi, and their hymns are of peerless grandeur and unrivalled excellence, irrespective of the age to which they

belonged. The great preceptor, Empār (Govinda Miṣrar) has elucidated in an isolated ' *muktaka* ' śloka, as follows:

" Sage Vyāsa explained hundreds of Upaniṣads, in his Sūtras, which he once again expounded in ' Tiruvāymoḻi ', reborn as Nammāḻvār; the third rebirth in the series was in the person of Rāmānuja, for effecting a proper synthesis of the two Vedantas through appropriate reasoning, reflecting ' Brahman ' therein, like a mirror. "

Here then is a glorious continuity of authorship, Nammāḻvār being a reincarnation of sage Vyāsa and Rāmānuja also being a reincarnation of that sage. As a matter of fact, Vyāsa was the incarnation of Lord Śrīman Nārāyaṇa Himself ' Kṛṣṇadvaipāyanaṁ Vyāsam Viddhi Nārāyaṇam prabhum.... ', " Vyāsāya Viṣṇurūpāya '. The initial unification of the Upaniṣads, in the form of a well-knit garland, known as ' Śārīraka Mīmāṁsā ', was effected by sage Vyāsa, who reincarnated as Nammāḻvar and imparted a special aroma to the ' Śārīraka Mīmāṁsā' through Tiruvāymoḻi, sending into raptures even the Celestials in the yonder region.

This has thus brought out the glory of Śrī Rāmānuja, who harmonised the two Vedāntas into an integrated unity through his ' Śrī Bhāṣya '. The veracity of the above observation of Empār can well be inferred from the repetition thereof, by no less than Śrī Vedānta Deśikar in his works and again, by Aḻakiya Maṇavāḷa perumal Nāyaṉār, the brilliant author of ' Ācārya Hṛdayam '. It is this synthesis, the glorious impact, in particular, of the Dramiḍa Vedānta on Śrī Rāmānuja, that has imparted a special aroma, a unique feel and flavour to his ' Śrī Bhāṣya ' and ' Gita Bhāṣya ', neatly spiced and thus marking them out as outstanding, something refreshingly different from the other commentaries in the field.

6. The unique grandeur and excellence of Saint Nammāḻvār and Tiruvāymoḻi vis-a-vis the Ṛsis and their works, namely, the Itihāsa-Purāṇas, known as Vedo-Upabrahmaṇas.

While an insatiate longing for incessant communion with the Lord has been a common feature of all the Āḻvārs, in the case of Śaṭhakopa (Nammāḻvār), it was a veritable extra-sensuous infatuation, an organic craving, a consuming passion, baffling description. Pulsating with God-love with every beat of his heart and panting through every pore and cell of his body, there was an appalling decentralisation of this hectic activity, each one of his senses, limbs and faculties vying with each other and throbbing for quick consummation. The love-smitten Saint would beckon a parrot to carry a message to the beloved Lord on the yonder heights but, in a state of rapturous impatience, actually commission a peacock, near at hand. In their competitive exuberance to get at the Lord, individually and in the quickest possible manner and time, each faculty of the Āḻvār would aspire to transcend its functional limitations, resulting in an overlapping of functions too. The hands would want to praise Him, the ears would pine to drink deep of His nectarean charm, the eyes would like to offer Him fruits and flowers, so on and so forth, a very extra-ordinary state of

affairs indeed ! (Tiruvāymoḷi III-8). And the beauty of it all is that the Lord responded in a like manner, talking to Śaṭhakopa through His eyes, looking at him through the sweet strains of His flute and so on (Tiruvāymoḷi IX-9-9). Did not the Lord say, in His 'Song Celestial', "Even I, the Omni-Scient and the Omni-potent, cannot express fully how dear I am to the 'Jñāni', because there is no limit to his love." In the same breath, He also declared, "If the 'Jñāni' lovesme so much, I love him even more." (Gītā VII-17) And so, this is a rapport, inherently operating both ways—the direct intuitive experience of the lover and the beloved. It is this Bhakti-rūpāpanna Jñāna or intellectual love of God, that has been referred to, in the opening stanza of 'Tiruvāymoḷi', as 'Matinalam', conferred upon Nammāḷvār by the spontaneous effort of a self-revealing God. As mentioned earlier, tradition has it that the Saint came into this abode within weeks after Lord Kṛṣṇa went back to the Celestium. The special fascination, which the Saint, therefore, had for this proximate Avatāra, has been dealt with in the body of this work at the appropriate places.

In his inimitable diction, Aḷakiya Maṇavāḷa Perumāḷ Nāyaṉār, the illustrious author of 'Ācārya Hṛdayam', brings out admirably the quintessence of 'Tiruvāymoḷi' and the unique splendour and greatness of Saint Nammāḷvār vis-a-vis sages Vyāsa, Parāśara and Lord Kṛṣṇa Himself. A study of Tiruvāymoḷi, without referring to this excellent guide, will certainly be very much the poorer for it. Says this brilliant Author, in aphorisms 51 to 83:

"Tiruviruttam", the first of the four works of Nammāḷvār expanded itself into the sweet-sounding 'Tiruvāymoḷi', like unto 'Ṛg' veda beaming as the tuneful 'Sāma' veda, when attuned to the sweet-sounding notes of the latter. As a matter of fact, 'Tiruvāymoḷi' is said to be on a par with 'Cāndogya Sāmam, of Cāndogyopaniṣad, which is so exquisite as to send the supreme Lord into raptures and made Him declare that, among the Vedas, He is Sāma Veda. (Gītā X-22).

Again, the four works of Nāmmaḷvār correspond not only to the four Vedas but also to the 'Vedo upabrahmaṇas', namely, Śrī Pāñcarātra, Itihāsas and Purāṇas, expatiating on the Lord's bewitching personality, prowess, traits, cosmic wealth and mighty deeds, directed towards the protection of the Righteous, suppression of evil-doers and resuscitation of 'Dharma' (moral standards), as and when they decline.

Whereas the Ṛṣis, with their tapasya-oriented knowledge and the resultant clarity of vision, went on compiling the works uninterruptedly, Nammāḷvār's profound knowledge, which ripened, rather bloomed into super-abundant love for God, choked him down to a state of trance, particularly when he meditated on the amazing simplicity of the Supreme Lord exhibited during His Avatāra, as Lord Kṛṣṇa. This happened not once but thrice, each spell of such suspended animation lasting as long as six months, the crucial stages being Tiruvāymoḷi, I-3-1, V-10-1 and VIII-8-1. Despite the profundity of their self-acquired knowledge, the Ṛṣis were bound down by 'likes' and 'dislikes' and caught in the vortex of worldly life; on the other hand, Nammāḷvār, with his revelational knowledge, got right on top of the world, well beyond its mischief, disentangled and disillusioned by a merciful Lord. The Ṛṣis subsisted on the forest produce, roots, fruits and so on, while Lord Kṛṣṇa was the sole sustainer for Nammāḷvār, the food that he ate, the water that he drank and the betels he chewed (Tiruvāymoḷi VI-7-1). The Ṛṣis (e.g.) Vaśiṣṭa, and Vedavyāsa, bemoaned the loss of their sons but the only pangs of grief experienced by the Āḷvār, were due to separation from the Lord during those agonising moments, when His glorious vision went out of sight of the former and the rapport between them got snapped.

Nammāḷvār's works became the cream of the whole compendium of 'Divya Prabandham', even as the 'Puruṣa Sūktam' gets the pride of place, among the Vedas, 'Manu Smṛti' among the Dharma Śāstras, 'Bhagavad Gītā' in Mahābhārata and 'Viṣṇu Purāṇa', among the Purāṇas. Rid of all their erstwhile equivocations and turbidity, the Saṁskṛt Vedas transformed themselves into the four works of Nammāḷvār in lucid Tamil, with a liquid flow and remarkable clarity. And this is how it is said to have happened. The Vedas, bespeaking the transcendental glory of the Supreme Lord in the High Heavens, took birth as Rāmāyaṇa and Mahābhārata, when the Lord came down to Earth as Śrī Rāma and Śrī Kṛṣṇa; the same Vedas appeared as 'Pāñcarātra' to dwell upon the Lord's attributes and activities in His 'Vyūha' or operative Form, when the seat of action shifts from the high Heaven to the 'Milk-Ocean'; yet another allotropic form of the Vedas is the 'Manu Smṛti', dealing with the 'Antaryāmi' aspect of the Lord, as the Internal Controller of all. And now, as the 'Dramiḍa Veda', the works of Nammāḷvār revel in the incomparable excellence, the matchless beauty of the Lord's Arca (Iconic) manifestation, with the characteristic clarity imparted by the Author, the chosen medium of the Lord Himself, sweet like the rain water, extracted from the brackish oceanic waters, ready to be partaken by one and all at all times. Unlike the cosmic Sun, which dispels the external darkness alone, '*Vakula bhūṣaṇa Bhāskara*' (Nammāḷvār) could permeate the inner recesses of human beings and rid them of '*tamas*', the internal darkness.

7. Grace first, Grace last, Grace throughout!

(i) Inspired and illumined by God Himself, Saint Nammāḷvār teaches prominently that the Grace of God is the sole means of our salvation. At this stage, it is indeed very relevant to go deep into this matter of 'Nirhetuka Kṛpa' (i.e.) the spontaneous or redemptive Grace of the Lord. We are told that the Lord sheds His grace on us voluntarily and in a manner wholly unrelated to the merit in us. Śrī Rāmānuja used to address the Lord, every now and then, as "Anālocita viśeṣa aśeṣa loka Śaraṇyā", (Śaraṇāgati gadyam-Śloka 5 and Śriraṅga Gadyam, Śloka 7) bringing out the benevolent protection extended by the Lord unto one and all of His Subjects, without distinction of 'High' and 'Low'. Śrī Vedānta Desikar exclaims: '*niṣkiñcana janasvayaṁ rakṣādhikṣā*'— "The Lord takes great delight in redeeming, of His own accord, those of us who have absolutely no claim whatsoever to His Grace by dint of our own merit, and has made it, as it were, a creed." This special dispensation redounds to His Great Glory all the more. Our great Ācāryas have, one and all of them, been vociferous enough in emphasising this special trait of the Lord.

(ii) If the means employed are much-too-slender, in comparison with the mighty dimensions of the end achieved and thus pale into insignificance before the latter, it would indeed be idle, rather preposterous to think in terms of correlating, much less equating the 'means' with the 'end.' The magnitude of the beatific bliss, entailing constant attendance on the Lord in that glorious celestial setting, rules out the possibility of the employment of any means worth the name for achieving it (i.e.) means commensurate with the results achieved. No doubt, the embodied soul cannot but do one thing or another all the time-may be a mixed fare, sometimes indulging in gambling and things of that sort and, at other times, taking to religious pursuits, such as worshipping the Lord and serving His devotees, listening to religious discourses etc. It is not all good or all bad. The very performance of good acts is a reward in itself, as it instils in us a sense of fulfilment. If it also attracts the good-will of the Lord, it is well and good, as He is wonted to lavish on us rewards, hundred-fold. When the reward does come to us, we shall not be foolhardy enough to ascribe it to the merit in us but take it as the merciful dispensation of the Lord. Even those mighty doyens, the veritable store-houses of knowledge, endowed with great spiritual prowess, said in their prayers to the Lord. 'Akiñcano aham', 'Na dharma niṣṭosmi na cātma vedi na bhakti mām' (Śloka 22 of Yāmuna's Stotra Ratnam), 'Nyasyami akiñcanaḥ Śrīmān!' (Śloka 2 of Nyāsa daśaka of Śrī Vedānta Deśika etc.,) What is the 'Ākiñcanya', referred to, by these stalwarts? If they did mean to say that they had no merit in them to win over His Grace, it has only served to bring into focus the plain truth that, in spite of all their equipment, they were still so infinitely small that nothing but His redemptive Grace could avail.

Again, but for His Grace descending on us, while still inside our mother's womb, we shall never be able to turn our thoughts on 'Mokṣa', the final bliss. At the commencement of the IX section, Upāya vibhāga Adhikāra of 'Rahasya traya sāra', Śrī Vedānta Deśikar has said 'Nidhānam tatrāpi svayamakhila nirmāṇa nipuṇaḥ'. The word 'Nidhānam' means 'Root-cause'. If the Lord is the root-cause for all the good that accrues to us, His subjects, what is the fun in looking upon ourselves as capable of raising in us a spiritual stature, lofty enough to attract His Grace, *ipso facto*? It is just against this background that the Lord is being looked upon, as the 'Ready Means' (Siddhopāya), the Means and the End, rolled into one. The arguments smacking of a *quid pro quo* recede to the background, yielding place to the sure and certain knowledge that His Supreme (redemptive) Grace alone matters. If Nammāḻvār's prayers, in his very first work (Tiruviruttam), for emancipation from this physical bondage impeding his continual enjoyment of Divine bliss, was not fulfilled by the Lord there and then, it was again due to His great concern for the teeming millions of suffering humanity. While granting the Saint, right here, all that enjoyment pined for by him in the yonder Heavens, the Lord deliberately kept him in this abode, for quite some time, so as to get from him all those four scintillating hymnals for the uplift of mankind as a whole. Are not the Āḻvārs and Ācāryas 'Tatva dharśis', mentioned by the Lord in Bhagavad Gītā, the propagators of true knowledge, shorn of doubts and despair, discrepancies and deviations?

(iii) The God, postulated by the Saint, is not that icy-cold, abstract being, divorced from every kind of relation which makes up man's idea of the Divine

Being. The Lord is most intimately linked up to us, a personal God who is not a mere principle, but one nearest, dearest and most patent to our heart and understanding, holding relationship such as our Creator, our Father, Donor, Judge and above all, our sole Refuge; His greatness lies not in His might and majesty in the celestial setting in the yonder Heaven, invisible and unapproachable, but in His condescending love and redemptive Grace, shed unto the myriads of His creatures, deep down here, sunk in sorrow. As already pointed out, 'Tiruvāymoḻi' opens with a characterisation of God, as an inexhaustible fountain of bliss, the repository of a multitude of auspicious qualities, each one of which is of unlimited dimensions (anavadhika-athiśaya), thereby silencing, right at the very start, those philosophising on a 'Nirguṇa Brahman', an abstract God, devoid of attributes and predications. It is indeed a matter of Grace galore on the part of the Saint, his melting tenderness of heart and boundless compassion for the fellow-being, badly caught up in the unenviable meshes of earthly existence, that he chose to share with the world at large this revelational knowledge, literally swelling up his rapturous heart and overflowing, so as to be within reach of us all, at this distance of time. No doubt, Gautama Buddha too had, out of pity and compassion for the suffering humanity, renounced the regal life of ease and peace and took to mendicancy. But he did not postulate God in his philosophy. Here then is Nammāḻvār, in refreshing contrast, who, even during his ecstatic moments of God-enjoyment, was not unmindful of the worldlings. He would, now and then, address them and, undaunted by their callous indifference, present to them a sure and certain recipe for all their ills and evils, namely, loving surrender to God, with a mind disengaged from the erroneous notions of 'I' and 'Mine'. In the opening stanza of his very first work (Tiruviruttam-100 stanzas), Nammāḻvār, the humble petitioner, begins with the grateful recognition of God's incessant labours, incarnating in ever so many forms to wean away the errant souls steeped in falsehoods, eking out an unholy existence of dirt and devilry through the media of their foul bodies. He also *beseeches the* Lord's condescending attention to his own humble petition to rescue mankind from falling into the pit of inferior births, and worse still, the malignant pit of lust (Kāma) and aimless wanderings away from Him, disillusion and lift them up to Divine consciousness, so as to enable them to drink deep of His insatiable beauty and be rivetted to it. This God-love intensified itself in an amazing manner and grew up to astounding dimensions, as successively revealed by his other works, namely, 'Tiruvāciriyam' (7 stanzas), 'Periya Tiruvantāti' (87 stanzas) and 'Tiruvāymoḻi' (1102 stanzas).

(iv) The growth and evolution of the mental state of the Āḻvār on the spiritual plane, as revealed in his four works, have a strong parallel in the mental attitudes of Bharata. The Āḻvār's state of mind, worked up through 'Tiruviruttam', was like that of Bharata, sunk deep in dejection when his mother addressed him as king, on his return to Ayodhyā, soon after king Daśaratha's demise; in the next work, 'Tiruvāciriyam', the Āḻvār was like unto an agitated Bharata, who, with his retinue, went into the forest and sought out Rāma; in 'Periya Tiruvantāti', the Āḻvār nurtured his God-love, as sedulously as Bharata did, during the long tenure of his stay in Nandigrām where Rāma's pair of sandals had been installed on the throne and his return from exile was eagerly

awaited. And then comes the finale, the blissful consummation in 'Tiruvāymoḷi', like unto the reunion of Rāma and Bharata, followed by Rāma's coronation and the due fulfilment of their respective roles in keeping with their essential nature. The love of this super-mystic sitting inside the hollow of the tamarind tree in the temple of 'Ādinātha' in 'Ālvār Tirunakari', became as vast and expansive as the Lord Himself who, as Trvikrama encompassed the entire universe, high and low. Verily, the Saint's transcendental love engulfed even the Lord and consumed the very object of love-love, taller than the sky and bigger than the ocean, the very acme of 'Kṛṣṇa thṛṣṇa'—God-hunger and God-thirst. Says the Saint, in the climactic tenth decad of the tenth centum of 'Tiruvāymoḷi', "Once bound to Thee thus, I am so secure that neither Thou canst shake me off nor can I shake Thee off." The wonderful, all-conquering Lord, quick and responsive, could envelop the Āḷvār's love, full and flooding, and it was the ultimate realisation of this fact that led him to the transcendental Sanctum (Śrī Vaikuṇṭa), (Tiruvāymoḷi X-10-10 and 11).

(v) It is with the advent of this Bhakti cult that God-love has become the pivot of religion. Unlike the scholastic or speculative theology, as it is called, which, at best, teaches us to know God and produces learned men, doctors and theologians writing commentaries, mystical theology teaches us to love God (wisdom, matured into love of God), producing ardent lovers of the Almighty devoted to His loving service, the fullest blooming of the lotus heart of man, thirsting for spiritual communion with God.

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